

Connect
Cobb



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Northwest Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis



10 December 2012



Northwest Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis Study Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

CONNECT COBB

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Study Participants:

The citizens of Cobb County and the City of Atlanta
Cobb County, Fulton County and the cities of Atlanta, Acworth, Kennesaw, Marietta, and Smyrna
Atlanta Regional Commission
Federal Transit Administration
Numerous planning partners at state, regional and local agencies and institutions

Study Consultant Team:

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cobb County Department of Transportation has conducted an Alternatives Analysis to study transit needs and potential improvement alternatives along the Northwest Atlanta Corridor. The corridor extends roughly 25 miles northwest of Atlanta (Fulton County) from its southern terminus in Midtown Atlanta to its northern terminus in the City of Acworth (Cobb County). Today, the corridor between Cobb and Fulton Counties has some of the highest travel demands in the Atlanta region. It is currently served by Cobb Community Transit's Route 10, which is among the most cost-effective bus routes in the southeastern U.S., boasting a farebox recovery of 47 percent – substantially higher than national averages. Current ridership on this single bus route underscores the strong demand for transportation choices in the corridor. In addition, that demand is driven by a diversity of travel markets throughout the corridor, including commuters destined to employment opportunities in Atlanta, a growing number of reverse commute trips, local trips made by students and seniors, and local trip making for shopping, recreation, medical, and other services.

The goal of the Alternatives Analysis study, referred to as "Connect Cobb," was to evaluate all reasonable modal and multimodal alternatives and general alignment options that can best serve existing and future mobility needs both effectively and efficiently, encourage sustainable land use patterns, complement the local economy and improve the quality of life of citizens, visitors and the business community. Based on extensive public outreach activities combined with technical analysis that focused on the transportation benefits of the alternatives, an innovative hybrid Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) was identified that is able to address the unique combination of mobility and other needs in the corridor.

This hybrid LPA is comprised of arterial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along US 41 and express bus in the I-75 managed lanes. This hybrid service is the only option able to meet the two major trip demands in the corridor. The first type of trip is the long-haul commute trip that is traveling from/through Cobb County to other regional destinations. The express bus service component of the LPA operating along I-75 addresses this trip pattern. This service also leverages other transportation investments being made in I-75, including the planned addition of managed lanes along I-75 by the Georgia DOT. The second trip type is for localized access to and between the major activity centers along the Northwest Atlanta Corridor. The arterial BRT portion of the LPA serves these as well as other trips. Further, BRT on US 41 will help anchor and promote more sustainable development in the future. In total, the LPA is better than any other alternative considered because it successfully achieves the following key objectives:



A modern, efficient Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), one component of the hybrid LPA, will serve trips throughout the US 41/Cobb Parkway corridor.

- Utilizes infrastructure that is existing (I-75 HOV lanes inside I-285) and proposed (managed lanes on I-75 outside I-285) bolstering the system's cost effectiveness
- Supports peak period express commuting trips with a limited number of stops

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- Connects major activity centers within the corridor (e.g. Kennesaw State University, Town Center Area, Southern Polytechnic State University, Dobbins ARB, Cumberland Galleria, Georgia Tech, Atlantic Station, Midtown Atlanta)
- Supports City land use plans (e.g. GreenTech Corridor) with accessibility via circulators and feeder routes
- Enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of the demonstrated reverse commute into Cobb County
- Supports demonstrated localized trip opportunities
- Demonstrates sensitivity to the human and natural environmental issues
- Complements economic development and redevelopment opportunities (e.g. Cobb County's Redevelopment Overlay Districts)

Regional Transit Context

The Atlanta metropolitan area is advancing regional transit coordination of the existing service providers and planning for future service through the Regional Transit Committee's Concept 3. Service in the Northwest Atlanta Corridor is identified in this regional plan. Consistent with this regional plan, the LPA provides connectivity at its southern termini to MARTA at the Arts Center Station. In addition, the LPA crosses the City of Atlanta's Beltline Corridor near Northside Drive, allowing for an additional transit connection with the City's planned Beltline streetcar. The LPA also calls for a station in the Cumberland Galleria area that would intersect with the planned BRT corridor along I-285 that is identified in the region's long-range plan and in the *revive285* Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As each of these transit programs continue through the planning process, the LPA will be refined to ensure regional seamless service for its users.

The remaining sections of this Executive Summary describe the key elements of the AA study, including study purpose and need, the public process, and how the alternatives were evaluated to select the LPA for the corridor.

Purpose and Need

The following five goals were established for the Northwest Atlanta Corridor Alternatives Analysis to best align the needs of the corridor with the best option available.

1. Goal/Objective: Transportation

- Reduce congestion/improve traffic flow
- Plan for current and future needs
- Reduce travel delay
- Improve travel efficiency and reliability
- Improve safety

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2. Goal/Objective: Land Use Considerations

- More efficient use of land
- Increase housing choices
- Promote active, healthy lifestyles

3. Goal/Objective: Economic Development/Redevelopment

- Stimulate local economy
- Leverage public and private investment

4. Goal/Objective: Environment and Air Quality

- Minimize adverse environmental impacts to the built and natural environment
- Consult with local and regional stakeholders
- Promote environmental justice
- Improve air quality

5. Goal/Objective: Financial Considerations

- Maximize cost efficiency and cost effectiveness
- Develop a financially feasible project/leverage available resources

Public Involvement

To complement the technical components of the AA, a robust public involvement program was implemented to ensure community and stakeholder involvement. The public involvement approach was unique in that it combined traditional public involvement techniques and communication methods with more innovative opportunities for the stakeholders and public to be involved and engaged. This included strategies such as stakeholder teams, stakeholder briefings, stakeholder roundtables, kiosk events, interactive meetings, online surveys and social media tools.

Highlights of the public involvement program include:

- Participation and guidance from county, city, state, regional, and federal agency staff, and planning partners through two advisory teams: the Technical Team and the Partners Team;
- Coordination with Regional, State and Federal agencies such as Atlanta Regional Commission, Georgia DOT, and Federal Transit Administration;
- Stakeholder Briefings with elected officials, special interest groups, business community organizations and major stakeholders;
- Stakeholder Roundtables with community members, planning partners, area universities and businesses, special interest groups, city, county and regional agency staff;
- Inclusion of special populations such as low-income, minority, limited or non-English speaking, and the disabled with transit kiosks, project materials in Spanish and Portuguese, and briefings for community advocates;
- Outreach to City of Atlanta with interactive meetings held in conjunction with Atlanta BeltLine and Atlanta city staff;
- Significant online presence with an informative website, Facebook page and online survey tools; and

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- Two public surveys resulting in confirmation that the majority of the public places a high priority on improving transit services and facilities in the corridor.

Transit Alternatives Evaluation

The Connect Cobb AA built on previous studies establishing the need for and feasibility of transit improvements in the Northwest Atlanta corridor. A broad range of transit alternatives consisting of numerous alignment and technology options was evaluated, with screening conducted to narrow the list of feasible alternatives. That smaller list was then subjected to more detailed screening to select the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) best able to meet the corridor purpose and need.

The screening process involved a series of technical analyses that assessed the transportation, land use/economic development, environmental, and financial impacts of each alternative. The focus of those analyses was on identifying the differences in how well each alternative performed according to the established goals and objectives. Analysis results were summarized and presented for public input that was obtained through approximately 55 public outreach events over a 14-month period.

As the technical analyses were underway, however, it became clear that significant tradeoffs would be made by selecting one alternative over another. Notably, alternatives operating along I-75 were shown to serve well the commute market between Cobb and Fulton Counties. Conversely, alternatives along US 41 would better serve reverse commute trips as well as intra-corridor trip making for school and other trips. Further, other transportation planning ongoing in the corridor identified an opportunity to leverage the managed lane investments being made by the Georgia DOT on I-75. And in addition, analysis suggested that a fixed guideway transit investment along US 41 could support and catalyze economic development plans and initiatives underway by others. For these reasons, consideration shifted from a single alignment LPA to a unique hybrid LPA that would provide service along both US 41 and I-75.

By utilizing some existing infrastructure and strategic new infrastructure, the LPA has a significantly lower overall cost compared with the other build alternatives, yet provides similarly high levels of service to the user. The station locations that would serve both alignments include KSU, Town Center/Big Shanty, Barrett Lakes Parkway, Canton Road (hospital), Allgood Road, White Water, Roswell/Big Chicken Station, University/South Loop, City of Marietta's GreenTech Corridor, Dobbins ARB gate, Windy Hill Road, Cumberland Parkway North, Akers Square/Cumberland Parkway South, Mt. Paran, West Paces Ferry Road, Howell Mill Road, Beltline, Atlantic Station, and MARTA Arts Center Station.

To supplement this new transit service, localized access would be made available via a series of circulator and feeder operations in Cobb County for the following areas:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Acworth | Kennesaw |
| • Kennesaw State University | Town Center Area |
| • Marietta | GreenTech Corridor |
| • Smyrna | Cumberland Galleria Area |

The hybrid LPA, shown in Figure 1-1, was presented to the technical and partner teams, corridor stakeholders, and the Cobb County Board of Commissions to obtain input and concurrence.

Additional evaluation including further detail of the financial plan strategy, refinement of the ridership forecasting, and detailed environmental of this LPA will be accomplished during the Environmental Assessment phase.

Next Steps

Cobb County has already begun activities to further advance the project through the environmental process with the preparation of an Environmental Assessment. Following the NEPA procedures, over the

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next 18 to 24 months, the environmental impacts of the LPA will be further quantified. In addition, extensive public outreach will be continued. Other next steps include: ongoing refinement of ridership and travel time forecasting, further detailing of the financial strategy, and a benefit cost analysis. The results of this analysis will offer necessary information which enables the U.S. Secretary of Transportation to make findings of project justification and local financial commitment, will support the consideration and inclusion of the LPA in the Cobb County Transportation Plan as well as the City of Atlanta Transportation Plan, and will enable the local Metropolitan Planning Organization to include the LPA as part of the regional long-range transportation plan.

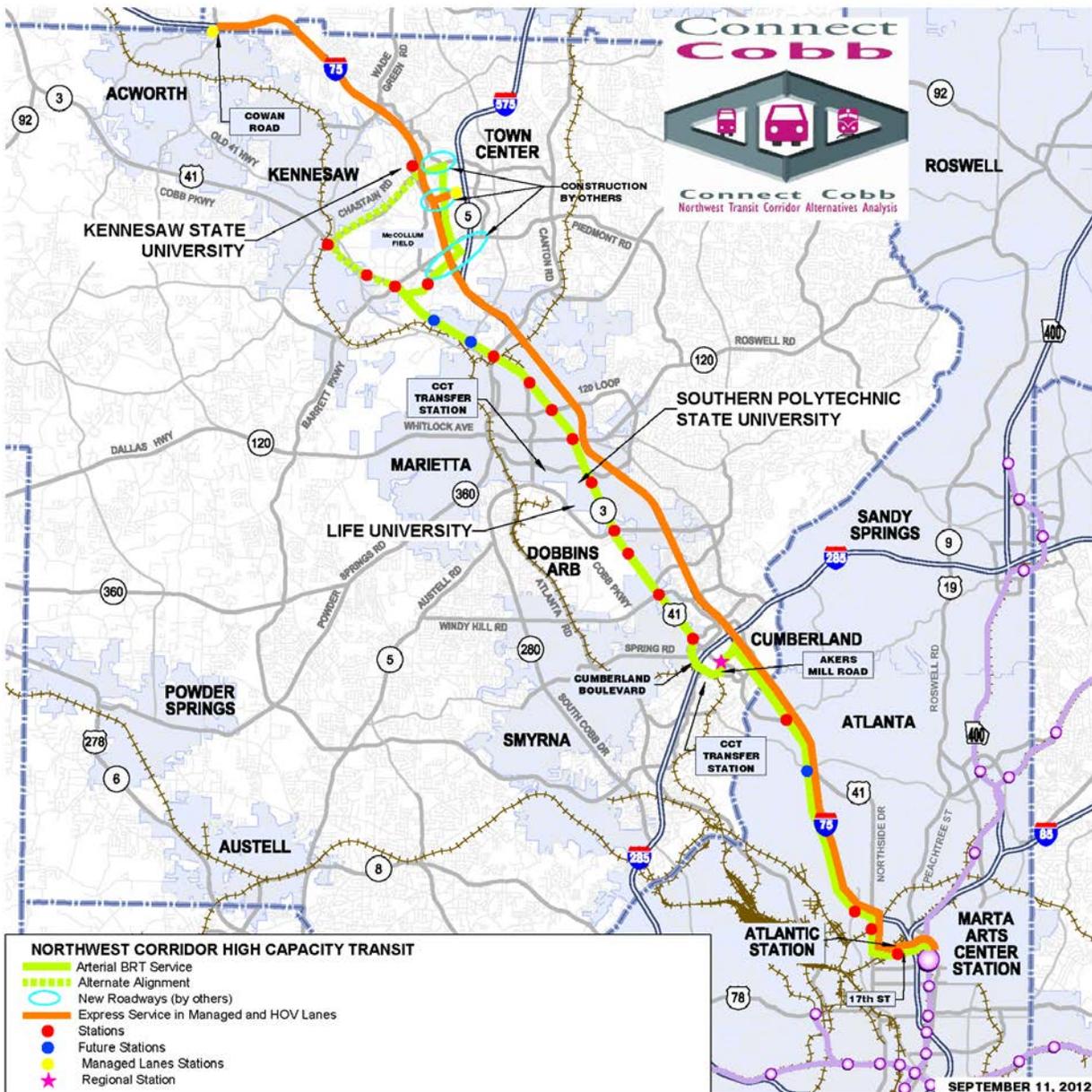


Figure 1-1: Locally Preferred Alternative