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# Those who use, fund MARTA must run it

**By CHIOKE PERRY and LAUREL PAGET-SEEKINS**

Once again MARTA is in a financial crisis. Due to the recession, sale tax revenues are down over \$39 million this year alone. Without other sources of funding, MARTA claims it will have to raise fares, cut service and lay off workers. These actions must be avoided. Already suffering due to the faltering economy, low-income transit riders will bear the brunt of service cuts and fare increases. Laid-off MARTA employees will join the growing ranks of the unemployed in Georgia.



► **Chioke Perry and Laurel Paget-Seekins** are co-chairs of the Atlanta Transit Riders' Union.

As a short-term measure, MARTA is asking the Legislature to remove the requirement that MARTA split its sales tax revenue evenly between its operating and capital budgets. This requirement was included in the original act authorizing MARTA and reflects

the paternalistic attitudes surrounding the creation of MARTA. It should be removed entirely. The Legislature should not have power over MARTA's finances when the state does not contribute any funds and the majority represents districts outside MARTA's service area.

Rep. Jill Chambers (R-Atlanta), chair of the Legislature's Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Overview Committee, has stated she plans to include a bill to lift the operating capital requirement, a provision that would put MARTA under the control of the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority.

ity. This move will decrease accountability to the people who actually pay for MARTA, the riders and the people of Fulton, DeKalb and the city of Atlanta.

The Transit Riders' Union agrees that MARTA needs to be accountable, but accountable to the people who actually pay for it. If the Legislature truly wants to restore accountability to MARTA, they should make MARTA's board of directors directly elected by the citizens of Fulton, DeKalb and city of Atlanta. This will remove power from board members representing the state, Clayton and Gwinnett counties,

which contribute no financial resources, and remove the "behind closed doors" political appointments of the board members.

The Legislature must also start funding transit operations in Georgia. Transit plays a critical role in the lives of thousands of Georgians who rely on it every day to get to work, school and medical appointments. Accessibility is a human right for everyone, regardless of ability to drive a personal vehicle. It is time for the state to step up and end the underfunding of transit in Georgia. In the short term, state funding can prevent transit agen-

cies from having to make service cuts and increase fares: in the long term, state funding can provide the necessary resources to expand service.

Atlanta needs regional transit, but it must start with preserving the system we already have. Transit should be expanded from the core outward, concentrating on serving the needs of dependent riders first. Any regional system must be governed by a board that is directly accountable to the taxpayers and uses proportional voting by population. All counties and the state must contribute funds to get a seat at the table.

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