

Atlanta Transit Riders' Union (ATRU) Statement on MARTA's Financial Crisis
January 9, 2009

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 service cuts and fare increases. Laid off MARTA employees will join the growing ranks of the unemployed in Georgia.

As a short term measure MARTA is asking the State 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 racist and paternalistic attitudes surrounding the creation of MARTA. It should be removed entirely. The State Legislature should not have power over MARTA's finances when the state does not contribute any funds and the majority represents districts outside of MARTA's service area.

Chair of the Legislature's Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Overview Committee (MARTOC) Jill Chambers has stated she plans to include in a bill to lift the operating-capital requirement a provision that would put MARTA under the control of the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA). This would only increase the state control of MARTA; GRTA is only accountable to the Governor of Georgia. 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. In addition, GRTA has no experience operating a transit system and currently only provides service to high income choice riders.

The Transit Riders' Union agrees that MARTA need to be accountable, but accountable to the people who actually pay for it. If the State Legislature **truly** wants to restore accountability to MARTA, they should make the MARTA 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 of Georgia, Clayton, and Gwinnett counties, who contribute no financial resources, and remove the 'behind closed doors' political appointments of the board members.

In addition to removing the 50% split requirement, the Transit Riders' Union calls on the State Legislature to start funding transit operations in the state of 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 agencies from having to make service cuts and increase fares; in the long term state funding can provide the necessary resources to expand service.

Members of the MARTOC committee are attempting to use an economic crisis, for which the leaders of their own party bear far more responsibility than MARTA, to increase their control over the transit agency. This power grab, with its roots in the racist politics that created MARTA, must be rejected by the rightful owners of MARTA, the people of Fulton and DeKalb Counties and the City of Atlanta. If the state wants any control over MARTA's finances, they should contribute.