

ATLANTA TRANSIT RIDERS UNION – ATLANTA JOBS WITH JUSTICE

STATEMENT ON MARTA FINANCIAL CRISIS

Layoffs, budget cuts, and foreclosures are all signs of a deepening economic crisis that is affecting every sector of our society. While trillions of dollars are spent on wars and to bail out Wall Street and the banks, very little of that money is getting down to the masses of people who need it the most. In public transit, we see fare increases, service cuts, and layoffs hitting every major system in the country. St. Louis, for example, lost 43% of their bus service because of severe cuts in operations funding.

MARTA's current crisis is caused by these national conditions, but is made even worse by this state's racist history of under-funding and paternalistic control of Atlanta's public institutions. In 1971, MARTA's original idea was to have a free fare, but this was unacceptable to the Lieutenant Governor, well-known segregationist Lester Maddox. He made sure that MARTA would be forced to spend half of its budget on capital expenses. This forced MARTA to make up the difference in operating costs at the fare box. In addition, the state placed four members on the MARTA board and MARTA continues to be the only major U.S. transit system to receive no operating help from the state.

Legislation to lift the 50/50 restriction on MARTA's budget recently failed to pass. MARTA now faces a \$24 million deficit, \$40 million next year, and a projected \$588-634 million shortfall over the next decade. What is MARTA management's response? They propose to raise fares, eliminate Friday service, and layoff workers. These drastic measures will have a severe impact on MARTA riders, those 30,000 who transfer to MARTA from outlying systems, and Amalgamated Transit Union members. Those who will be especially hit hard are the 63% of MARTA riders who have household incomes of less than \$30,000 a year and the 54% who depend on MARTA to get to work.

The state's racist refusal to provide MARTA operating resources it needs represents a failure to respect, protect, and fulfill the government's human rights obligations to our community. The Atlanta Transit Riders Union and Atlanta Jobs with Justice believe that everyone has a human right to jobs, housing, education, health care, and transportation access. Atlanta taxpayers pay half the state's taxes, but get back only one-third of what the state spends on services. It's time to stop the subsidizing of road-building in south Georgia, while MARTA, Grady, and our public schools struggle to survive.

Only a movement led by those most affected by this crisis can build the power we need at this critical time. We demand the state reconvene in order to lift the 50/50 restriction. We say "NO" to service cuts, fare increases, layoffs, or state takeover of MARTA. We say "YES" to better service, lower fares, state and regional funding, and community control. Nationally, we will be working with Transit Riders for Public Transportation, which supports mass expansion of transit and restriction of auto use. We organize knowing that the people themselves are the only protection we have against injustice. We did not cause this crisis and we are determined to not be the ones to pay for it.