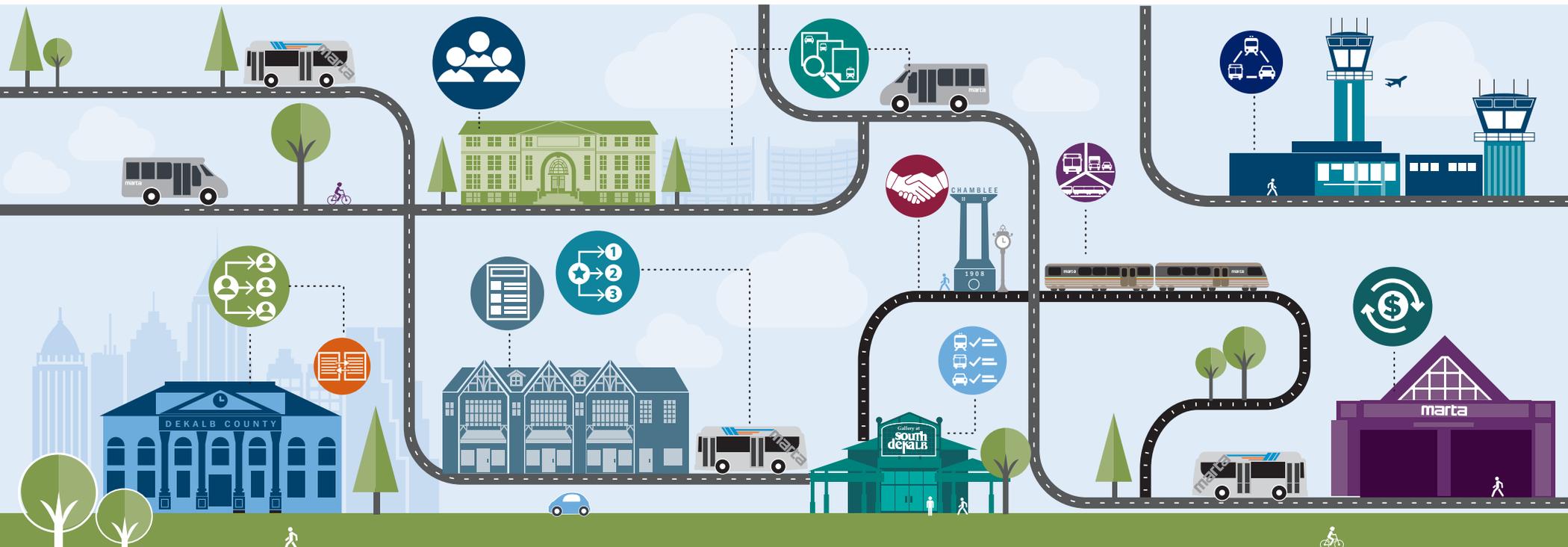


# DeKalb County Transit Master Plan

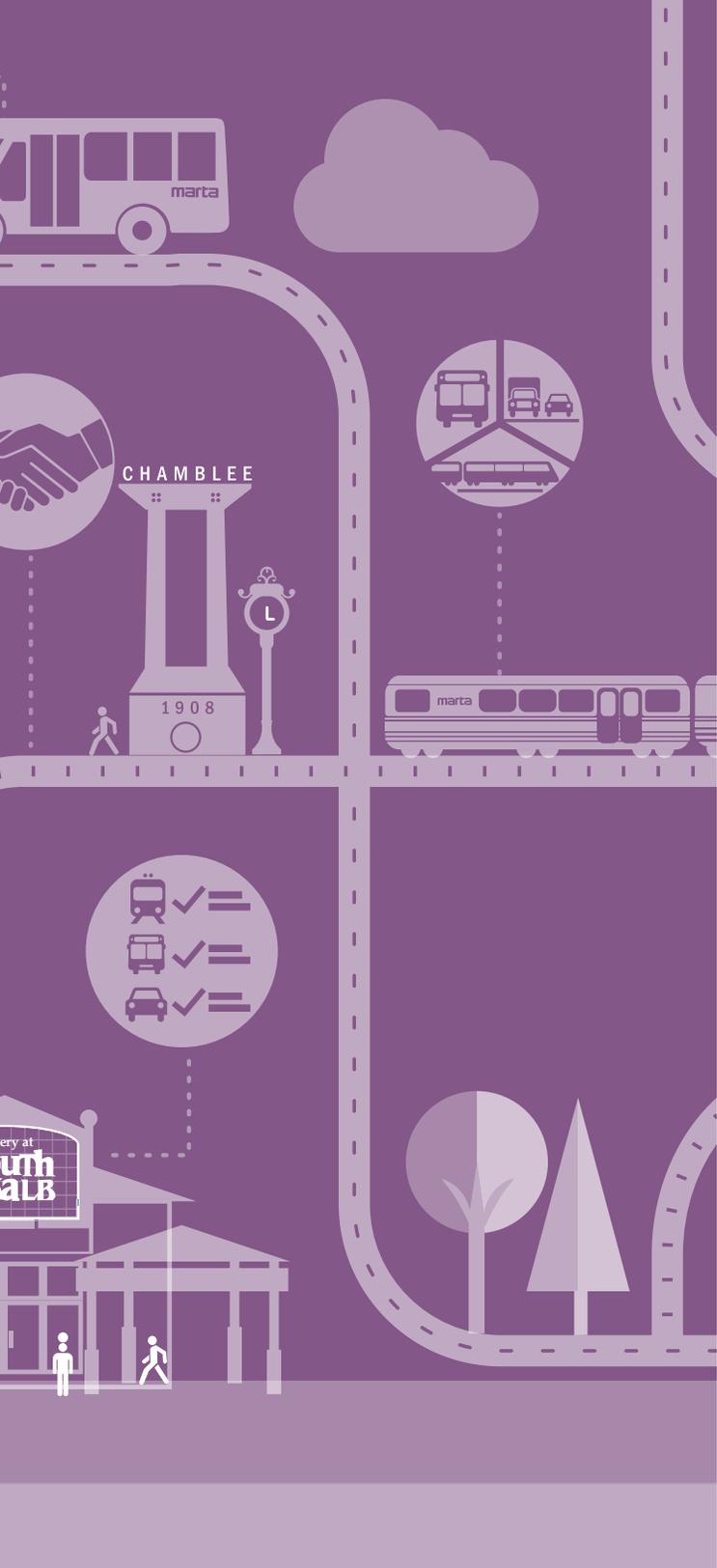
# Executive Summary



July 2019







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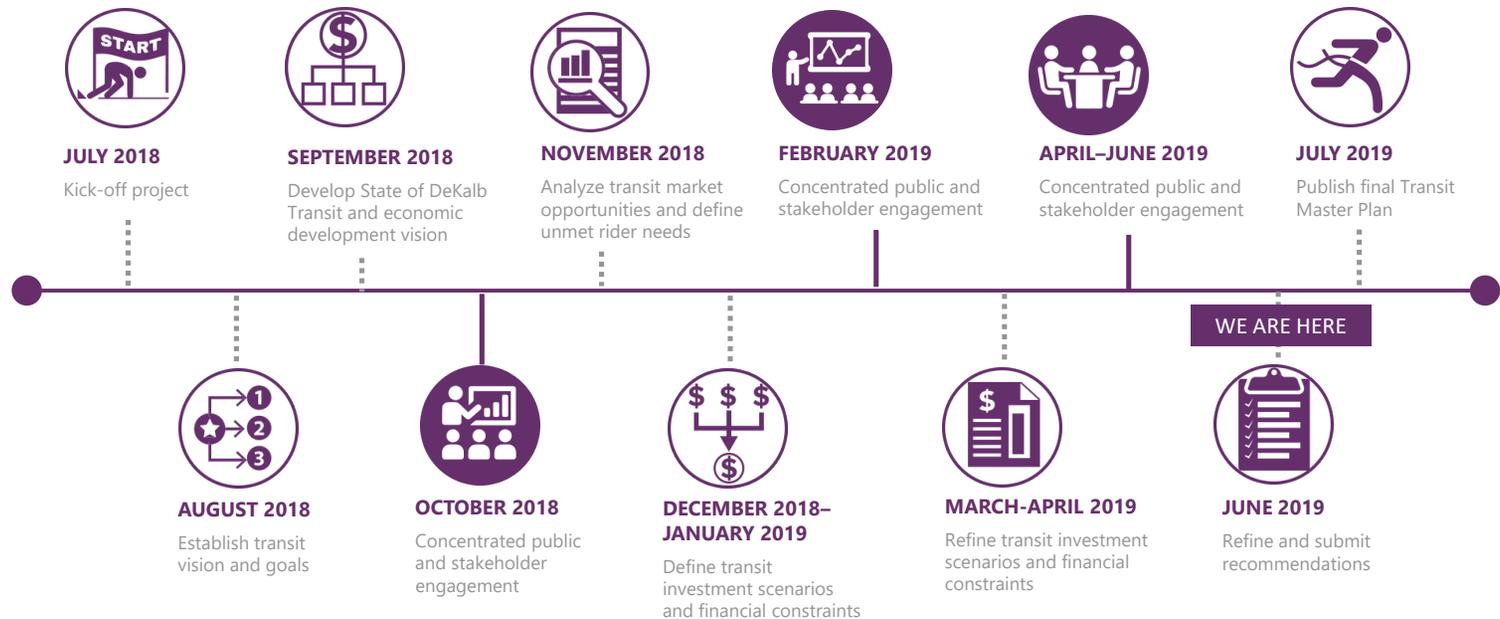
# Study Partners

The DeKalb Transit Master Plan (TMP) was developed through a transparent and collaborative partnership between **the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transit Authority (MARTA), and DeKalb County Government.** Additional study partners include the 12 municipalities within the County, and regional transportation agency partners the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and the Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL).



## Plan Development Schedule

The development of the DeKalb TMP was a 13-month process, which began in the summer of 2018 and concluded in the summer of 2019. Key project milestones have been identified in the timeline to the right.



# What is DeKalb County's Transit Master Plan?

The Transit Master Plan will address DeKalb County's **mobility challenges**, help to **enhance future development opportunities**, and **improve the quality of life** within each of DeKalb's cities and unincorporated communities, both north and south. The plan will also seize opportunities in DeKalb County for service enhancements today and expansion opportunities tomorrow to create a 30-year vision and beyond for transit investments.

## Project Goals



### Live, Work, Play and Use Transit

Focused on creating an environment where transit is a seamless part of living, working and playing in DeKalb County. By creating a robust network of complementary modes that include **different types of transit solutions**, the plan will **improve residents' quality of life** and businesses' bottom lines.



### Ensure that the Transit Vision is Affordable and Effective

Create an environment to **listen, educate, and collaborate** with residents, local businesses, cities, and DeKalb County, together we can develop a prioritized list of well-defined, realistic, and feasible transit improvements to guide us for the next few years and beyond.



### Make Sure Thriving and Emerging Areas have Transit Service

Defined **fiscally sensible solutions**, the Master Plan will **bolster economic development** activities in currently prosperous areas and encourage investment in those areas identified for future growth so that all areas of the County will benefit from future transit improvements.



### Make sure Transit is Available for Everyone

Provide mobility options for all DeKalb County residents. The recommendations will balance the needs of **discretionary riders** who could choose to commute via private automobile instead of transit with the needs of more **transit-dependent riders** such as seniors, individuals with low incomes, underserved residents, persons with disabilities, and youth.

# State of the Transit System

## Existing Transit Service in DeKalb County

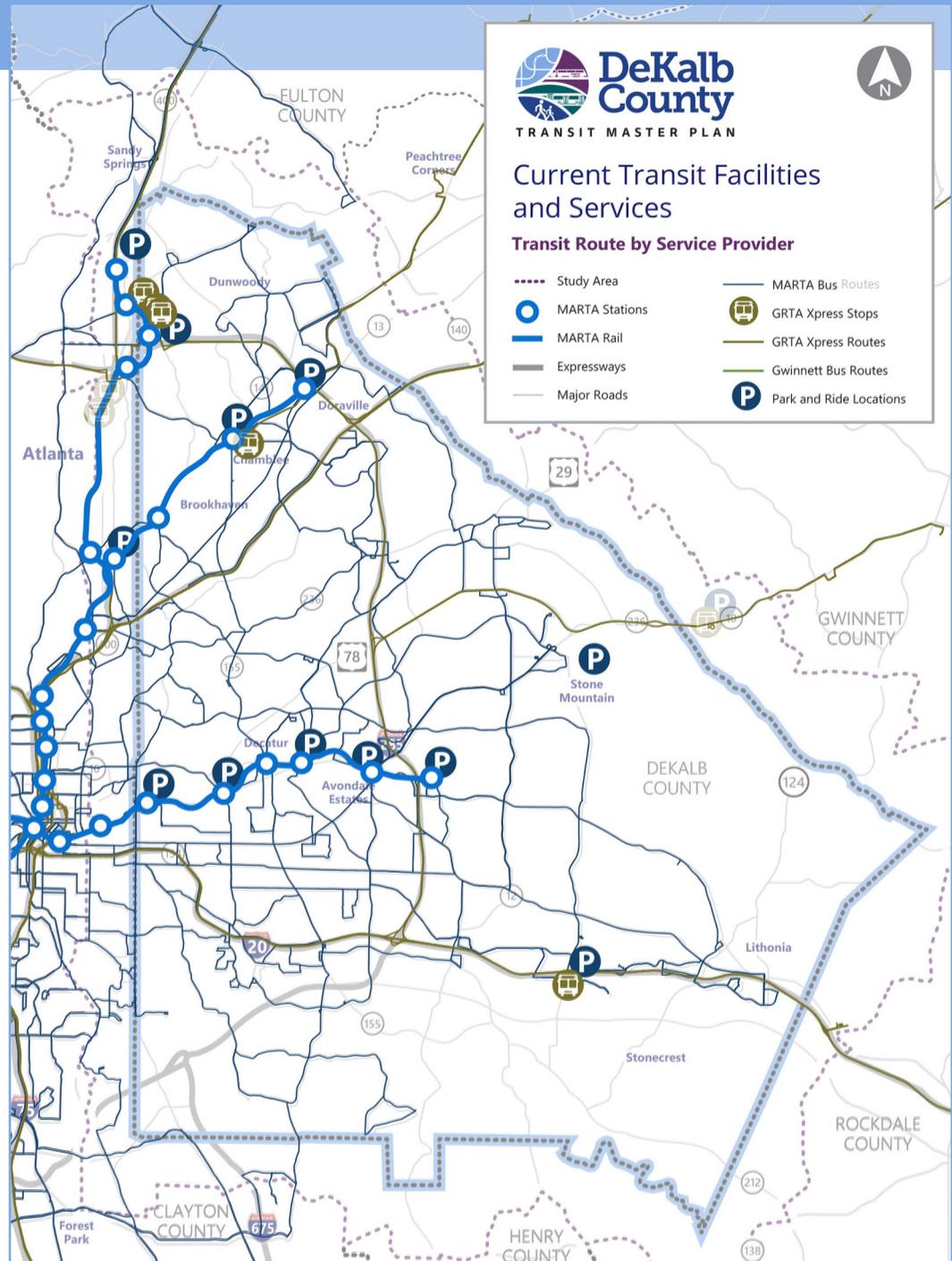
- 46 MARTA Bus Routes
  - SRTA Xpress Service
  - Gwinnett County Transit
- 10 Rail Stations
- 2 Park-n-Ride Locations

## Highest Utilized Train Stations

- Indian Creek
- Kensington
- Doraville

## Areas With High Bus Ridership

- Rail stations
- Park-and-ride lots
- Buford Highway
- Memorial Drive
- I-20 East
- Mall at Stonecrest
- Candler Road/South DeKalb Mall
- Emory/CDC

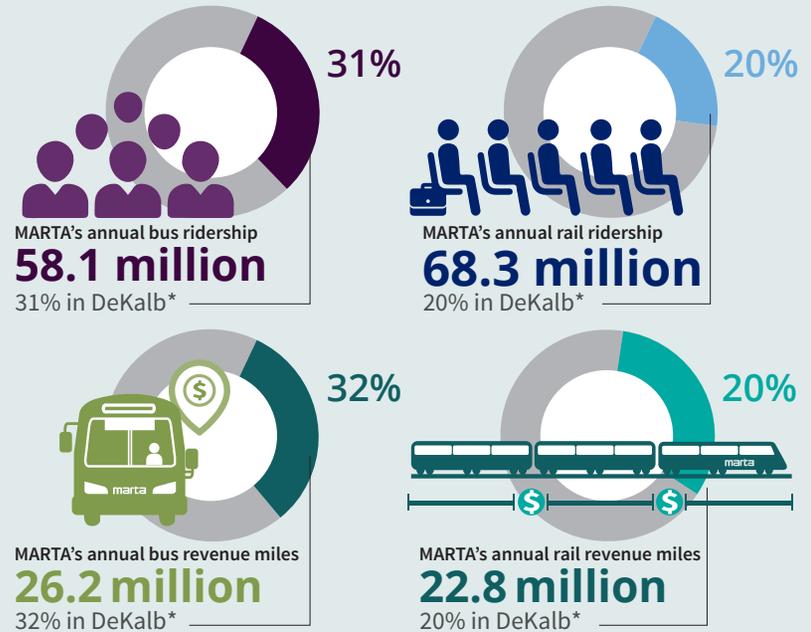


## To build a better transit system...

DeKalb County first must understand how the current transit system is functioning. Transit services in DeKalb County are provided by the MARTA, the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA), and a few independently operated private service providers. The map on the previous page illustrates the current MARTA rail, bus routes, and facilities located in DeKalb County and key systems operating statistics are noted in the infographics to the right and below.

## MARTA Bus and Rail Services

### 2017 Ridership and Service Statistics



\*Calculations exclude parts of DeKalb County within the City of Atlanta  
Source: Data provided by MARTA.

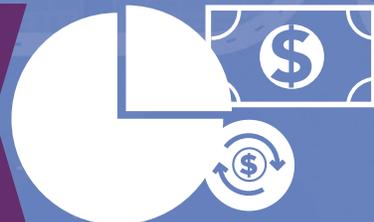
**34%** of the **marta** service area is in DeKalb County



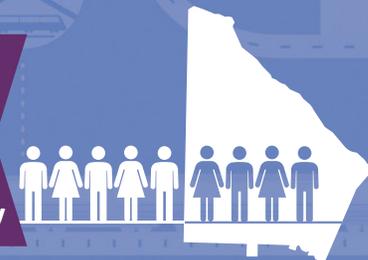
**27%** of employment in the **marta** service area is in DeKalb County



In 2017, DeKalb County contributed **25%** of the **marta** sales tax revenue



**36%** of population in the **marta** service area lives in DeKalb County



# Public Engagement Process

The DeKalb Transit Master Plan was developed through a comprehensive and robust public involvement process. A variety of traditional and innovative techniques were used to gather input from the public, stakeholders, neighborhood leaders and elected officials to ensure the plan addressed a wide-variety of community concerns and needs. Major engagement techniques included:

- **Public Open Houses**
- **Stakeholder Advisory Committee**
- **Stakeholder Interviews**
- **Project Management Team**
- **Peer City Tour to Minneapolis**
- **Focus Groups**
- **Transit and Land Use Visioning Charette**
- **Project Share (Pecha Kucha-Style)**
- **Project Website/Online Surveys/Fact Sheet**
- **Pop-Up Events**
- **DeKalb City's Outreach and Input Presentations**



## Examples of consensus and concerns heard through the public and stakeholder outreach process

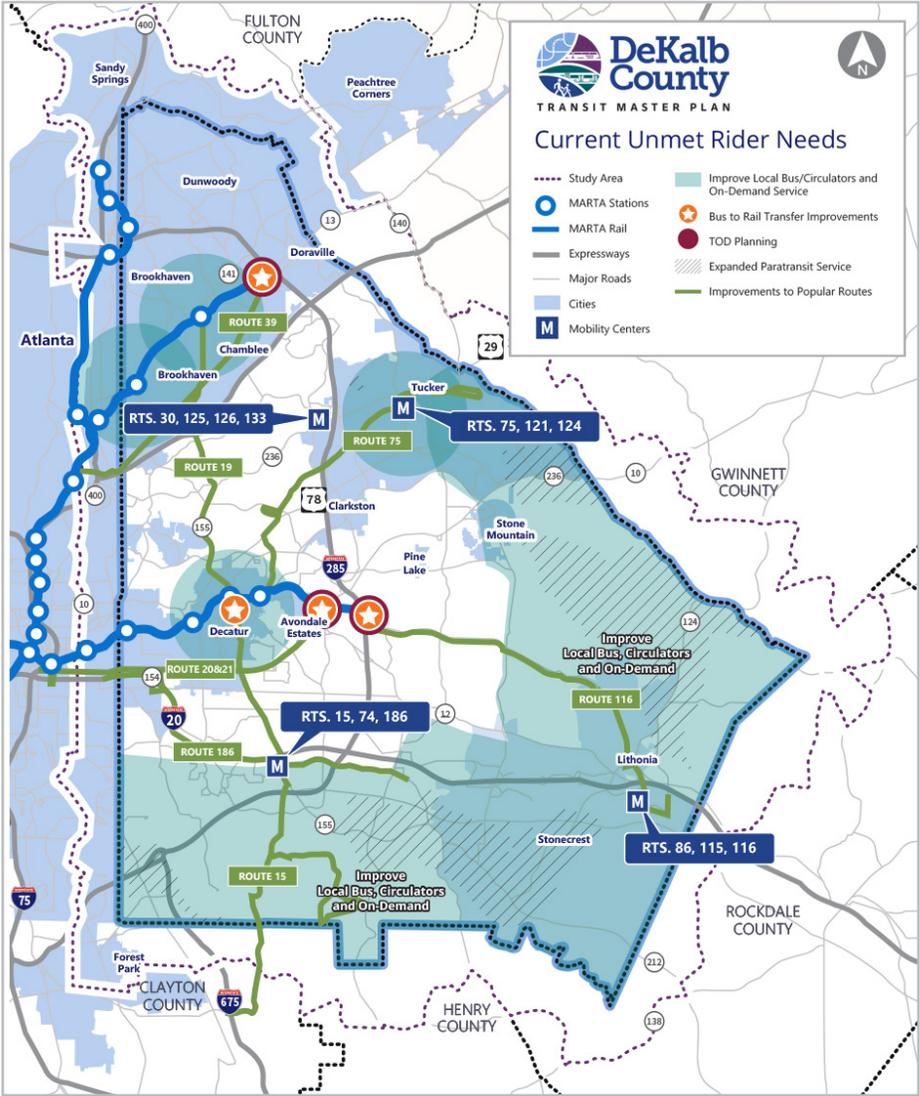


# Unmet Rider Needs

After listening to community input and completing a comprehensive review of the MARTA system, land use trends, and travel conditions in DeKalb County, the DeKalb TMP identified several unmet rider needs to be addressed:

- Expansion of paratransit services
- Improvements to bus service in popular corridors
- Mobility centers to better accommodate bus-to-bus transfers
- Expand local bus services, circulators and on-demand service
- Bus to rail transfer improvements
- First mile/last mile infrastructure improvements

For example, as indicated by the green shading on the map to the right, significant portions of South and East DeKalb are without local bus or paratransit services.



# State of Economic Development

## Economic Development is Inextricably Linked to Transit and the Linkage of People and Places: Homes, Workplaces, and Services

Economic development is a primary goal of the DeKalb TMP and was a major focus of the study, both in the assessment of existing conditions and through the evaluation of potential projects. Economic development is the set of policies, programs, and activities that seek to enhance the quality of life of a community by encouraging economic activity, expanding and retaining employment, and supporting a stable tax base to fund public investment. Transit is a powerful incentive to generate economic development. However, several job hubs in DeKalb are not well served by transit. In the Atlanta region, relocation initiatives by a number of large global employers have made it clear that they prioritize access to high-capacity public transit. Companies have identified access to transit as a necessary amenity to remain competitive.

### Key Findings from an assessment of existing economic development conditions include:

#### Most jobs are in North Dekalb

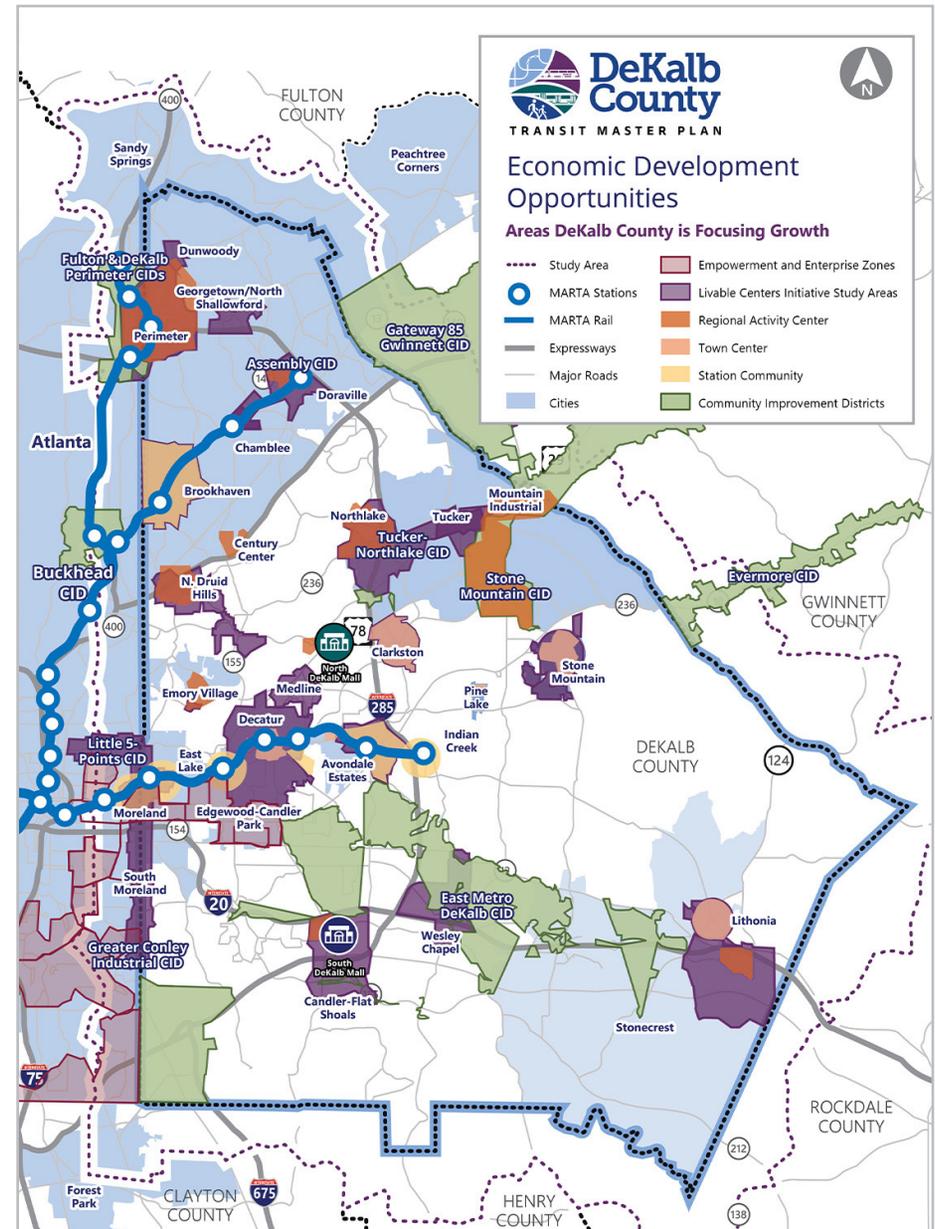
- Perimeter
- Emory/CDC
- Tucker/Northlake
- I-85 Corridor

#### Future Development opportunities

- Stonecrest, Covington Highway, South Dekalb
- Redevelopment along major arterials
- In-fill development in North Dekalb cities

#### Economic Development Initiatives are focused on Key Growth Areas

- These areas have champions, funding and plans
- These areas are “pre-cleared” for economic development and transit-supportive development



# High Capacity Transit Modes

The DeKalb TMP considered a variety of transit modes and services to meet the needs of DeKalb’s residents. **Four high capacity transit modes** were examined and included in the transit investment scenarios for DeKalb County. These modes include **Heavy Rail Transit (HRT), Light Rail Transit (LRT), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and Arterial Rapid Transit (ART)**. In addition, paratransit, mobility on-demand, and local bus modes were also included in the planning process.



## Arterial Rapid Transit

- Guideway:** Mixed roadway
- Frequency:** 15 min
- Payment:** On-board
- Land Use:** Supports some density and intensity
- Operating Cost:** Approx. \$100-\$150 per vehicle hour
- Capital Cost:** Approx. \$2.5 million per mile



## Bus Rapid Transit

- Guideway:** Seperate roadway
- Frequency:** 15 min
- Payment:** Off-board
- Land Use:** Supports some density and intensity
- Operating Cost:** Approx. \$100-\$150 per vehicle hour
- Capital Cost:** Approx. \$25 million per mile



## Heavy Rail

- Guideway:** Seperate Tracks
- Frequency:** 10 min
- Payment:** Off-board
- Land Use:** Supports significant density and intensity
- Operating Cost:** Approx. \$250-\$300 per vehicle hour
- Capital Cost:** Approx. \$250 million per mile



## Light Rail

- Guideway:** Seperate Tracks
- Frequency:** 10 min
- Payment:** Off-board
- Land Use:** Supports significant density and intensity
- Operating Cost:** Approx. \$250-\$350 per vehicle hour
- Capital Cost:** Approx. \$150 million per mile

# Financial Modeling

Financial forecasts for the DeKalb TMP were developed based on two revenue sources. However, this does not preclude consideration of other financial sources such as public/private or innovative funding options.

**Existing MARTA Sales Tax** – Revenue projections based on the current 1-penny sales tax assessed under the MARTA Act in DeKalb County. This source is used to maintain the current system in a state of good repair and deliver sustaining capital projects. Expansion of the system is not possible under this source.

**HB 930 Sales Tax** – Under new legislation passed in 2018, it is possible for DeKalb County to levee up to 1-penny in new sales tax funding for transit over 30-years. A ballot referendum would have to pass a County vote. If implemented, this sales tax could be used to expand transit offerings in DeKalb County. For the Master Plan, 30-year projections of a ½- and 1-penny sales tax revenue were calculated.

## Potential Sales Tax Revenue under HB 930 (over 30 years in 2019 dollars)

**Full-Penny**  
(Maximum Allowed)



**\$3.65 B**

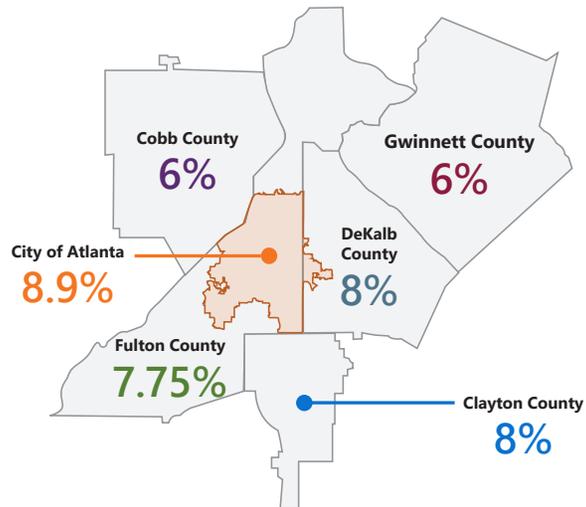
**Half-Penny**



**\$1.85 B**



## Current Sales Tax Rates



All but 4 counties in Georgia are at 7.0% or 8.0% sales tax



## Financial Forecasting

### DeKalb County Sales Tax

State of Georgia	4%
EHOST ( <i>Equalization Homestead Option Sales Tax</i> )	1%
Education	1%
SPLOST	1%
MARTA	1%

**Current Total 8%**

# Universe of Projects & Evaluation

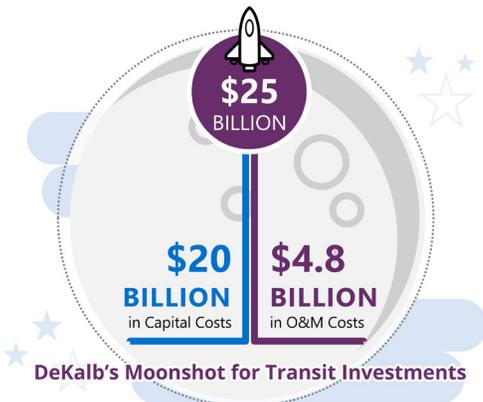
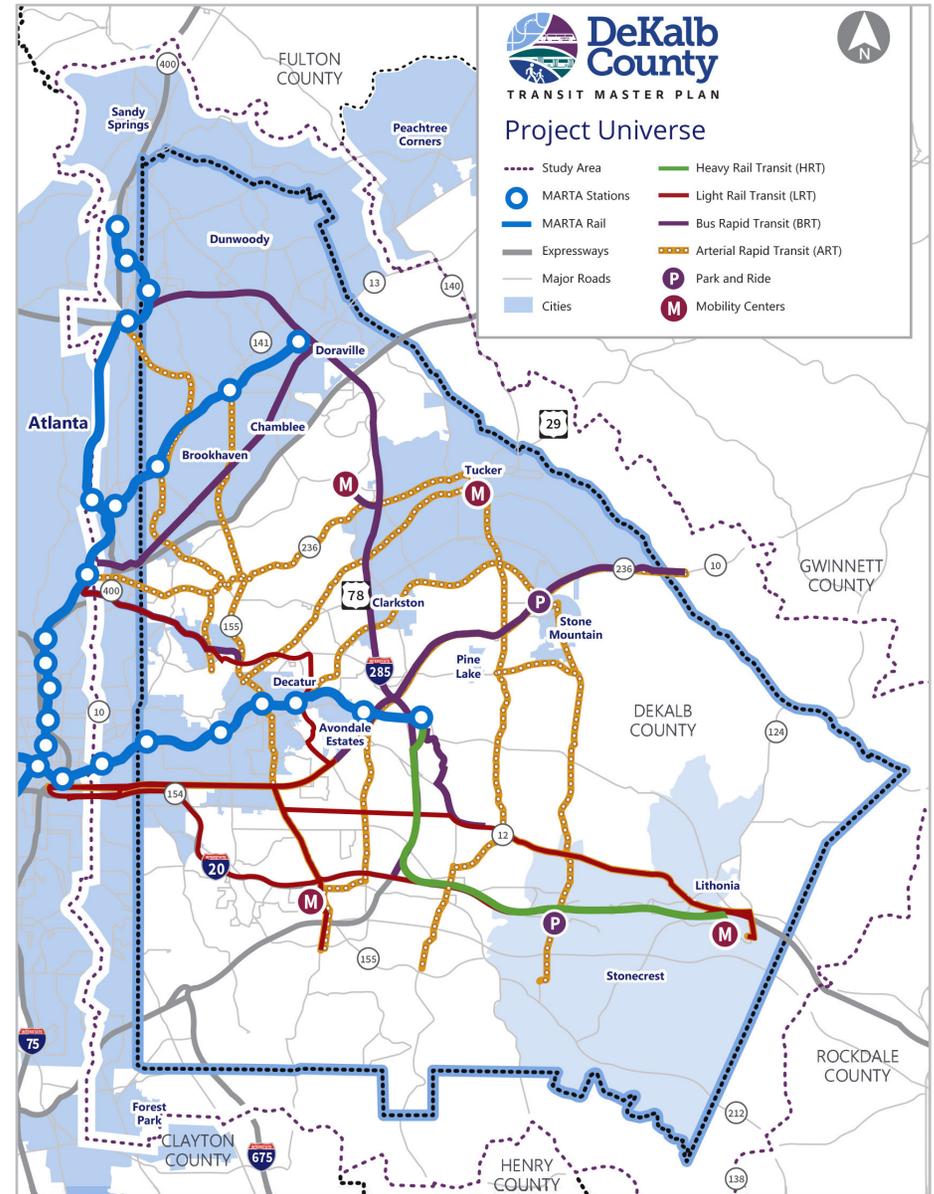
The DeKalb TMP process engaged the community and stakeholders to identify the universe of potential transit expansion options. Through this process, a total of 40 potential transit concepts totaling roughly \$25 Billion were advanced into an evaluation process.

## Evaluation Process

Each concept in the universe of transit options was evaluated across four major goal areas:

- **Performance:** Comparison of ridership projections
- **Economic Development Potential:** How well a potential option serves the economic development vision for the County
- **Equity:** How well a potential option serves Equitable Target Areas (ETAs), high concentrations of low-income and minority populations
- **Land Use Compatibility:** How compatible a potential option is with land use densities and intensities

In addition to the four evaluation areas, cost estimates were developed to compare overall benefits against projected costs.



3 Heavy Rail, 9 Light Rail,  
13 Bus Rapid Transit, &  
15 Arterial Rapid Transit  
Projects

**\$20 B** in Capital Costs

**+ \$4.8 B** in O&M Costs\*

**\$25 Billion**

\*Includes sustaining capital funding

# Recommendation 1

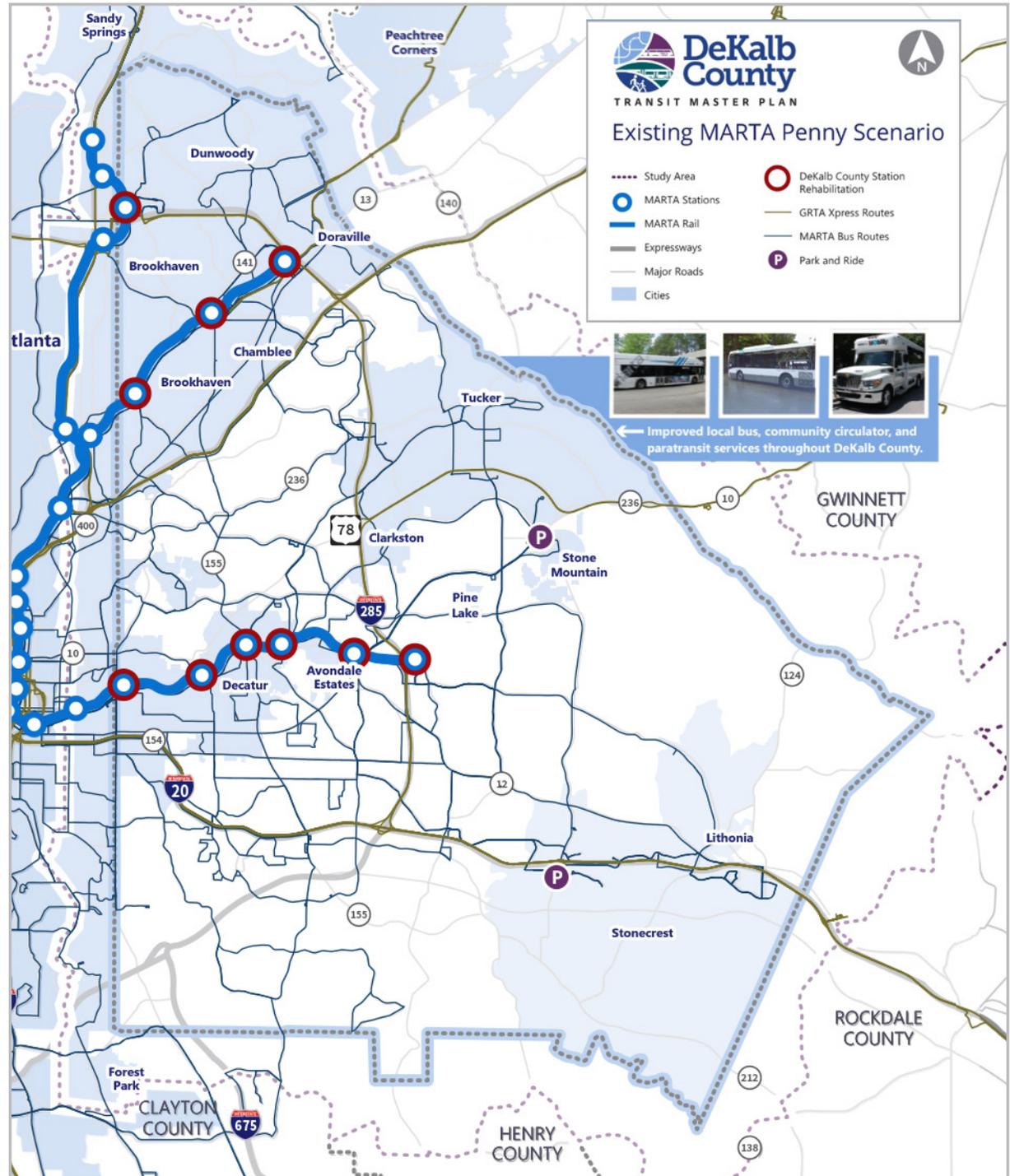
## Advance Four Transit Scenarios for Further Consideration and Additional Public Input and Education

It is the recommendation of the DeKalb TMP that four potential transit scenarios be advanced forward for additional public and stakeholder input and education. These scenarios include the **Existing MARTA Penny Scenario, Half-Penny Scenario, Full-Penny Scenario, and Previously Adopted Scenario** as illustrated on the maps that follow. The public/stakeholder education and input process should be designed to increase the public's understanding on the travel benefits and impacts of the scenarios. Additionally, visualizations of how modes will integrate into the community such as 3D renderings, models and videos may be necessary. Education on future-proofing to address the impacts and opportunities of advancing technologies as part of the implementation of the DeKalb TMP is also recommended.

### Existing MARTA Penny Scenario



Focuses on the maintenance, sustaining capital, and operations of existing system with no additional transit expansion projects.

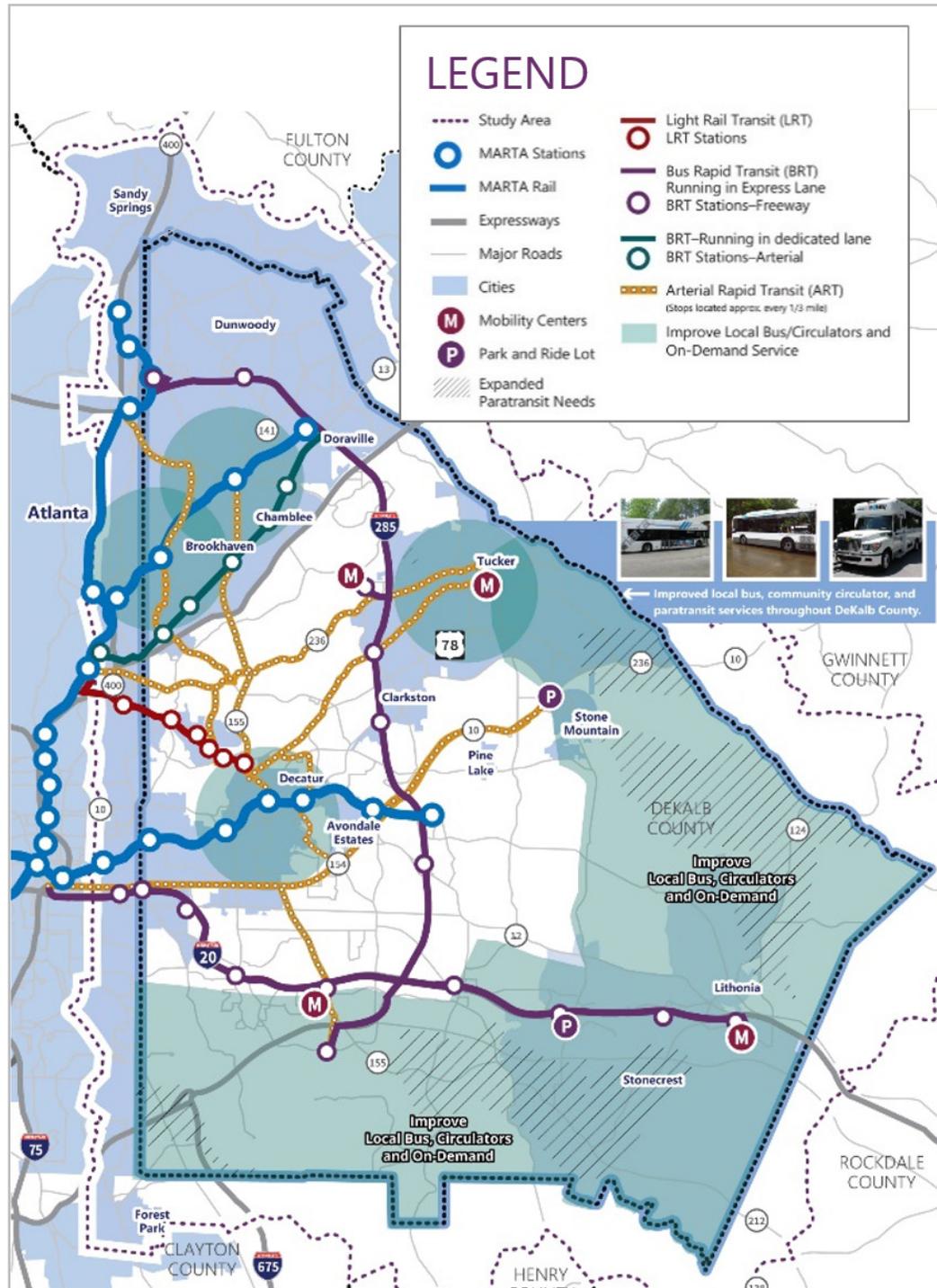


## Half-Penny Scenario



**Features 15 projects: 1 LRT, 5 BRT, 9 ART, and 139 project miles, which are affordable under a ½-penny sales tax increase.**

**This scenario seeks to leverage GDOT's investments in managed lanes for BRT on I-285 in DeKalb County.**

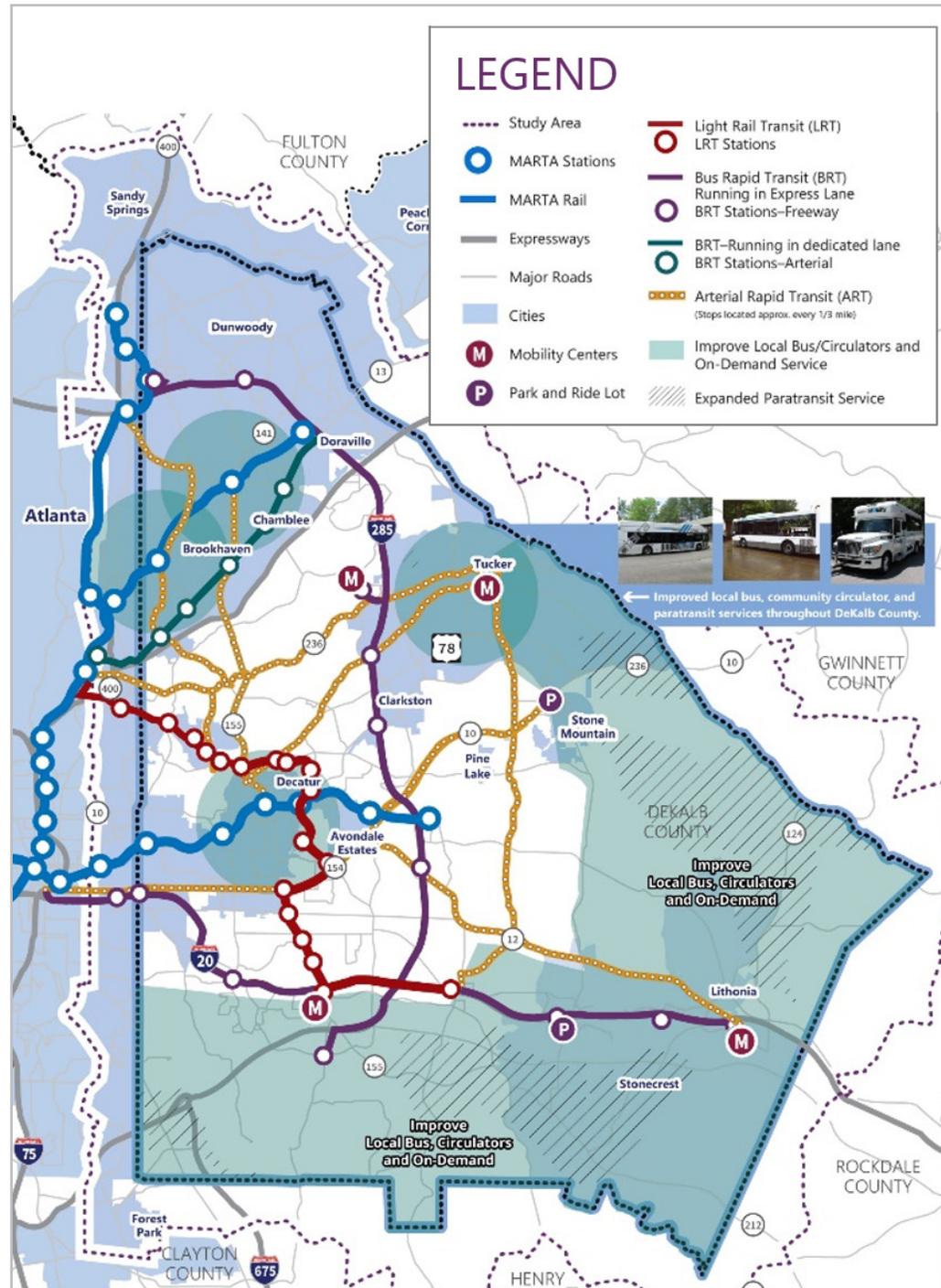


## Full-Penny Scenario



**Features 16 projects:** 4 LRT, 4 BRT, and 8 ART and 180 project miles, which are affordable under a full-penny sales tax increase.

This scenario seeks to leverage GDOT's investments in managed lanes for BRT on I-285 in DeKalb County.

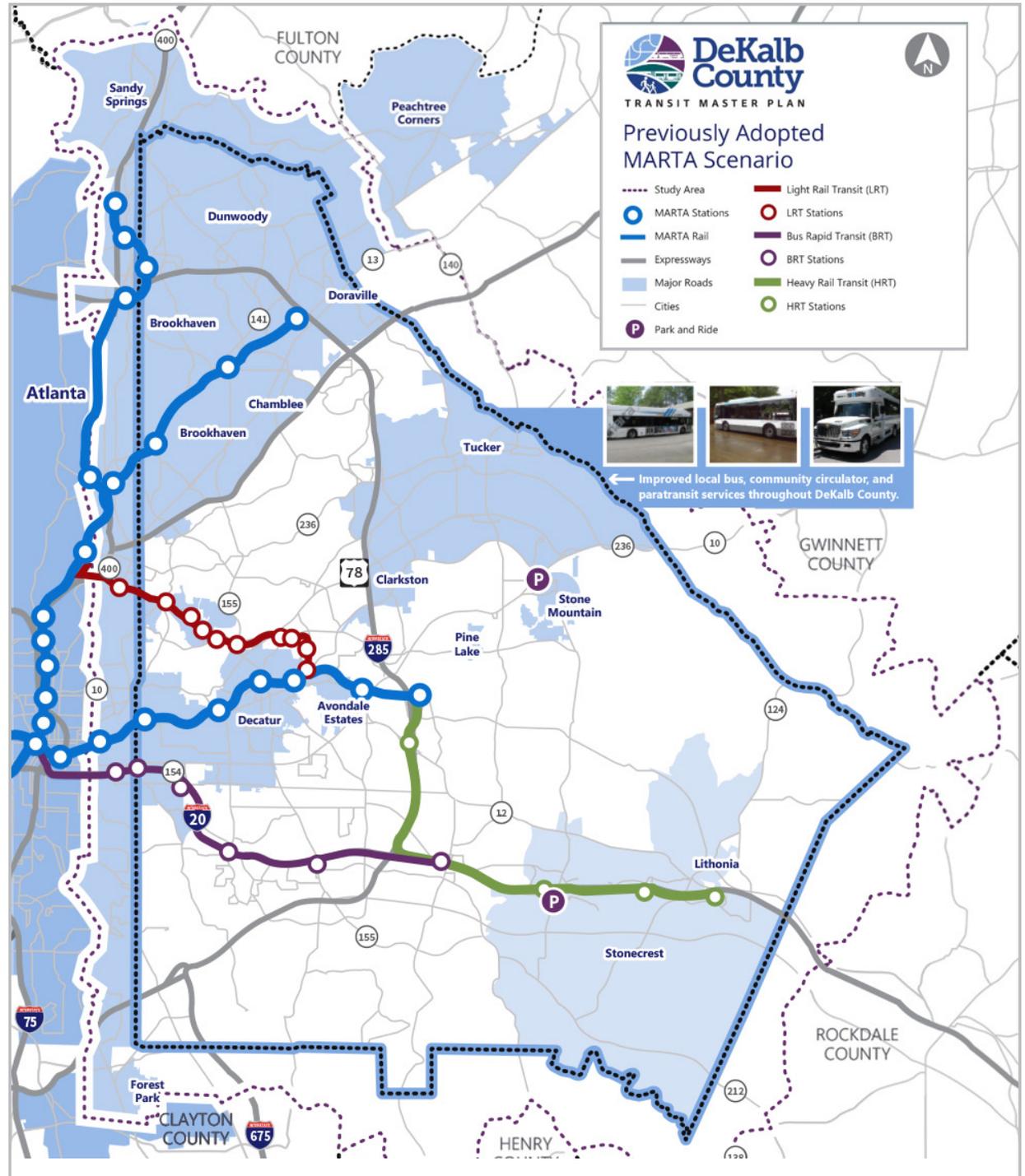


## Previously Adopted Scenario



**Features 3 projects: 1 HRT, 1 LRT, and 1 BRT and 37 project miles. Requires more than 1 penny sales tax.**

**Focuses on MARTA Board adopted plans for I-20 East and Clifton Corridor in 2012.**



## Recommendation 2

### More Public/Stakeholder Education and Input on Project Delivery and Innovative Financing Opportunities

Throughout the DeKalb TMP process, the public, stakeholders and the DeKalb County leadership stressed the need for identifying transit funding opportunities beyond the HB 930 sales tax option. Thus, it is also recommended that DeKalb County and MARTA provide continued public education on the following three areas: **Public-Private-Partnerships (P3)**, **value capture financing**, and **the competitive nature of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) capital investment grant process**.



### Project Delivery and Innovative Financing Opportunities

#### Public-Private-Partnership (P3)

A **project delivery agreement** between a public owner and a private sector partner for the design, construction, financing, and operations & maintenance for the transit project



#### Value Capture

A type of **public financing** that recovers the value that transit projects generate for private landowners around stations

#### Competitive Federal Transit Administration Process

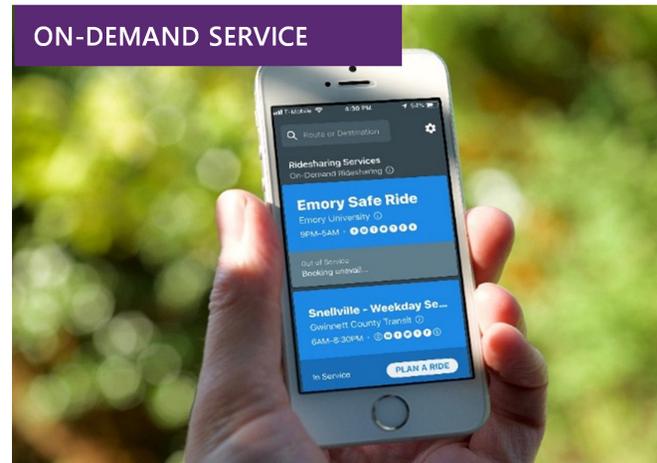
Capital investment grants for transit

# Recommendation 3

## Collaborate with MARTA on Current Unmet Needs

Increase coordination between DeKalb County and MARTA is recommended to ensure that transit projects to address current unmet needs are delivered using funds from the existing MARTA sales tax. Improvements to be delivered by MARTA should include:

- **Paratransit expansion in south and east DeKalb**
- **Mobility centers**
- **Bus to rail transfer enhancement projects**
- **Last mile/first mile connectivity projects**
- **Improvements to bus routes that serve high ridership corridors**
- **Expanded local bus coverage, bus circulators, and mobility on-demand services**



## Recommendation 4

### Collaborate with MARTA and agency partners on the advancement of expansion projects consistent with the DeKalb TMP

DeKalb County should coordinate with MARTA, GDOT, the ATL and other agencies to advance the definition (i.e., planning and design concept) of key projects included in the DeKalb TMP scenarios. Because BRT in managed lanes on I-285 is a key project concept of the DeKalb TMP, and the fact that the current GDOT schedule for delivery of these lanes is within the next few years, it is extremely important that DeKalb County and MARTA immediately collaborate with GDOT to define BRT design solutions that effectively integrate into GDOT's managed lanes projects without impacting the delivery schedule. Advancing the expansion projects consistent with the DeKalb TMP include:

- **Re-evaluate I-20 East High Capacity Transit to Stonecrest**  
(GDOT coordination)
- **Bus Rapid Transit in I-285 East Wall and Top End Express Lanes**  
(GDOT coordination)
- **Bus Rapid Transit for Buford Highway**  
(GDOT coordination)
- **Clifton Corridor Light Rail Transit**
- **Extension of Clifton Corridor-Central and South DeKalb Light Rail Transit**
- **Arterial Rapid Transit Network**

## Recommendation 5

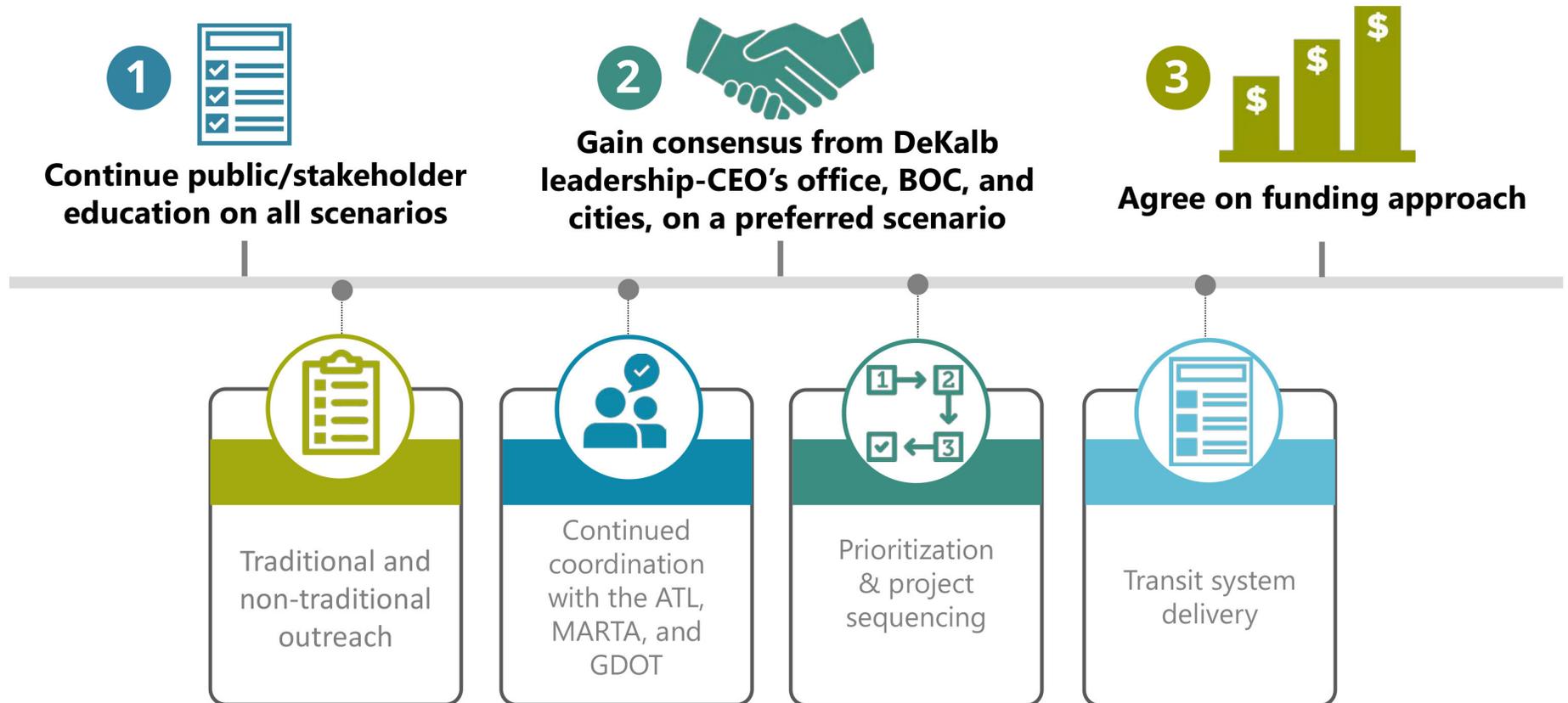
### Align land use, development codes, and transit efforts

It is recommended that DeKalb County as well as the 12 cities within the County undertake efforts to better align land use and development policies to support transit investments. Transit supportive land use consists of land uses that support – economically and socially – the effective use of transit. Land use decisions and transit-oriented development investments promote transit usage, walkability and compact development forms and help to maximize exchange and activity within station areas and transit corridors. It is vitally important that the DeKalb County Comprehensive Plan is updated to include the DeKalb TMP high-capacity transit corridors, and direct growth in these areas. Land use codes also should be strengthened to incentivize private investment at station areas and enhance opportunities for securing FTA funds.



# Steps to Implementation

The path forward includes three important steps necessary to achieve implementation of the DeKalb TMP. As mentioned, the County must continue public/stakeholder education on the transit scenarios. Additionally, the DeKalb County leadership including the CEO's office, the Board of County Commissioners, and the 12 cities must work collectively to select a list of transit expansion projects to implement. Finally, implementation will require agreement on a stable funding approach, which could include a combination of options such as a sales tax increase, state and federal funds, as well as private sector investments.





# DeKalb County

## TRANSIT MASTER PLAN

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