



DeKalb County Government

1300 Commerce Drive
Decatur, Georgia 30030

Minutes

PWI-Public Works & Infrastructure Committee

Thursday, March 24, 2022

11:00 AM

Special Called

This meeting will be conducted via teleconference (Zoom). Simultaneous public access to the meeting will be available

(1) via live stream on DCTV's webpage,

(2) on DCTVChannel23.TV

Meeting Started At: 11:01 PM

Attendees: Commissioners Cochran-Johnson, Terry, Patrick

Present 3 - Commissioner Lorraine Cochran-Johnson, Commissioner Robert Patrick, and Commissioner Ted Terry

I. DISCUSSION

Local Funding Mechanisms For Public Transit Expansion

-presentation from Grady Smith, Principal at VHB of the transit master plan and discussion of potential funding options

-Question LCJ: with the passing of HB 930, this is an issue that is very dear to the community. Very early on there was hesitancy, and DeKalb County and others carried the legislation for the establishment of MARTA. It's important at this point that we take decisive actions. Everyone please pay careful attention to the roadmap. Director TJ Sigler is here today and prepared to show what it would look like in terms of County funding.

-presentation from Director Sigler on calculations of 2 scenarios - 1 with a sales and 1 with a millage rate

-option 1: 1% sales tax countywide

-option 2: quarter mill on property tax bill

-Question TT: regarding millage rate is that general fund or unincorporated?

It would be countywide and apply to all properties in the county

-Question Mayor Ernst: 1 penny sales tax is equal to about 3.88 mills? It would be about \$140 million dollars then?

TJ Sigler: that seems reasonable

-Question TT: could Director Sigler speak to the certainty of the projections? How many years are we talking for the sales tax and millage rate?

LCJ: we haven't yet determined that; at this point it's imperative to determine whether we should have the local match and move from there

TJ Sigler: regarding how we put together the projections I'll start with the sales tax. We took a similar approach to when we put together the SPLOST revenues. We used the most recent numbers from 2021 and applied a 1% estimator each year, which is a fairly conservative assumption. That is subject to economic cycles. Historically property taxes have been more stable, with exceptions such as the great recession and housing crisis when there was a large decline. Both of those have been historically stable for us

Z Williams: although we have not done a look back analysis, understanding property taxes are collected sooner or later local governments do collect on the tax bills. Whereas sales tax, you collect on what you collect that year and there is less of a look back.

-LCJ: countywide, we are seeing an increase in property values. That does seem to be more stable than the sales tax barring any major events.

G Smith: regarding the question on the length of time, it is a 30 year assumption at this point

-LCJ: thank you for that. We have not yet at this time determined the definitive course of action. But absent of that we must have a local match and determine the funding source

-Question TT: the underlying acknowledgment here is that DeKalb is growing. The expectation is that revenues will go up - there will be more development and people who are spending more money. On the conversation of funding, could you all speak to the additional layers of funding regarding special service districts or tax allocation districts?

LCJ: this will require a conglomerate approach beyond roadways. As it relates to TAD's and special service districts, because those monies have been earmarked, are those funds flexible at all? For TAD's they are for a defined area. Are these potential funding sources?

G Smith: in my presentation I discussed value capture - we do believe there are those opportunities as we implement new transit corridors across the county. In the unified plan, we're identifying those places where we're seeing new places of density that could be opportunity to value capture

LCJ: got it. So when you say value capture, the key here regarding TAD's would be a defined area?

Mayor Ernst: I've done some numbers on this before. It's imperative we look at all these different mechanisms; you could layer some on, such as a half-penny and a value capture combination for example. There's an opportunity here to revolutionize transit funding to make this perpetual. In Singapore their transit system is funded by the land they own; it didn't start that way but there are opportunities here

LCJ: going forward you all have to go back and determine what would work best for your particular city as well

TT: for the mayors, as it stands now the current master plan - is that something the cities want to endorse from the core elements?

-Mayor Ernst: regarding the master plan, I was on the stakeholder meeting. I see some items that have already evolved. My goal would be to figure out how to get an equitable county-wide system throughout the entire county where everyone is roughly the same. I think there is a way to do it. I was in a meeting with Cobb County recently - if we go in 2024, Cobb goes in 2024, Gwinnett goes in 2024, that would be a good course. If we start the process now it may be a heavy lift. This time of 2024 would allow us to determine the mechanisms and determine how best to layer these options regarding value capture, special service districts, etc. For Brookhaven I don't believe we're ready for 2022. For the region I believe in 2024 a yes vote would be feasible for the entire region to come together on

-Mayor Pro Tem Powers: we have 2 members in the City of Decatur who voted no on this a few years ago. We have 3 MARTA stations at the current moment and there's a lot going on in and around our master plan. With the transitions at MARTA there's a lot. We would probably need a work session to discuss this as well. For 2022 our work sessions are pretty set but we could set time aside to discuss. But we would be interested.

Mayor Geierman: I want to echo what Mayor Pro Tem Powers just discussed. I do think our council will be in favor but they need to understand what it looks like. I will also echo Mayor Ernst's comments on not wanting to get this wrong on rushing this. I agree that BRT is probably a good solution for a lot of areas, but I know how it's perceived by others as a less-than transit solution. I think there needs to be conversations on the branding of that.

LCJ: you raise a very interesting point. When you here BRT, immediately there is a consensus amongst a group that BRT is a sacrifice to rail that should have been given in the agreement with MARTA. It is not a sacrifice it is more of an evolution. It moves even faster than standard rail. The key is mobility quickly. The costs certainly need to be considered and it's important for us to determine the best course of action and education on the course of action. We don't have the luxury of getting this wrong; it's important we reach a point of consensus regarding the facts and have a detailed plan on how we will achieve this Mayor Burks: I can echo the sentiments of my peers as well - we do need that time. A critical piece in this is education -perception is reality. As we're having these discussions with our communities, we need to ensure we are clear on the perceptions. In south DeKalb many feel that have been less than in terms of providing services. We should ensure we are providing an equity lens in terms of services. For our city we will be on board with this. We should invest in the time and education to ensure our citizens understand the facets of this. If we're going to do this we should ensure we have the right messengers out in terms of outreach

-LCJ: thank you for that. I'm beginning to feel we need the formation of a central committee, with representation of all 13 municipalities, where we take the deep dive. I'm willing to do whatever is necessary. From there the municipalities go back and discuss with their municipalities and we come back, that may be the right approach

-Mayor Deutsch: I have a couple of questions. The current TSPLOST expires the end of next year. I would say we're not ready for a vote in 2022, there's not enough lead time and education needed. We are very invested in bus rapid transit on the council. My goal is, as rapidly as possible, we get job-centered connections to where people need jobs. As technology evolves, rail may be a possibility down the road. The quickest way to help families out of poverty is transportation. I look forward to working through this to come up with something that is equitable but also quick. Thank you for having this meeting, we will circle back with our council, but I don't anticipate an issue with working with a plan that gets things done.

-Question TT: for the MARTA team, could you speak about what happens after funding is approved? Let's say a referendum passes and we commit to transportation, what is the practical rollout of those services? In year 1, what happens, in year 5, etc. G Smith: it will vary by project type. One of the first things we want to understand is priorities and equity. It will take time to deliver the projects over the course. Step one is determining priorities of the project, then creating a timeline of the delivery of the projects. Another key piece is determining the funding. Projects funded by local dollars have different timelines that projects with federal funding. The process of delivery includes a planning phase, environmental phase, design phase, construction phase

-LCJ: regarding the program of delivery, it can often be difficult. The key is to set the goal and lay the foundation regarding what we decide. We must be in unison on what that looks like, as well as the messaging that surrounds it. It is imperative that we are One DeKalb in this

-comments provided by Interim CEO Collie Greenwood, MARTA

-LCJ: thank you for discussing the funding that is coming down the pipe. In order for us to move forward there must be a local match. Until we have a local match there is a difference between theory and action

-Rep. Viola Davis: also inviting the state elected officials would be great in this as well. I would love for you to keep us in the loop. My team is working on an equity assessment that includes transportation

-Question TT: regarding MARTA and Clayton County, MARTA increased their funding. How long did it take for funding to be passed to have something on the ground? How long does it take to have something on-line from point a to point b MARTA Team: the advantage we have here for 2024 is understanding your priorities and developing the phasing for the projects in the next 2 years. That would allow us to have the timing figured out in advanced, so that when the tax is passed, we can go. For the city of Atlanta the priorities were not initially clear so it did take a bit more time. Same for Clayton County, a lot of the planning and preparation started once the sales tax was passed. If we can have the planning done here in DeKalb, that would allow us to move more quickly than previous projects

-LCJ: it would be difficult to assess an outcome or deliverable

-TT: in Clayton County they waited until the last minute and it passed. Cobb and Gwinnett and DeKalb are not all the same. At the end of the day we're asking the residents to decide. What Gwinnett did 2 years ago was the right move, and it could

have passed. In 2018-2019 we came together. We as DeKalb County voted for Joe Biden, Raphael Warnock, and Jon Ossoff. Our top issues were healthcare, education, infrastructure. Transportation was part of that, and Congress passed the bipartisan infrastructure bill. It's a 5 year funding cycle. In 2024, say we pass a referendum and get the funding set. In 2025 waiting that long is too long to deliver on those promises that voters voted for. When we look at the totality of the whole universe, there is several billion dollars. This new policy for 80% federal and 20% local, what would be the number for us to fund the 20% of that master plan? If we had no local funding, then the FTA may say we'll wait to see when you have local funding and we'll talk about it then. How much can you educate until there's a decision that has to be made. We can analyze this for years, but transit will change dramatically over the next 10 years.

-LCJ: in lieu of time your statements are well-received. I have to caution you - when we speak of education, we can put anything on the ballot but that doesn't believe it will be well-received. People will need to fully understand what is the course of action.

-LCJ: a transcript of this meeting will be sent out, we will receive feedback from our municipalities. Once we hear back from each on receiving the feedback, we will move as expeditiously as possible. Today is where we start regarding this particular discussion

-RP: thank you very much for holding this meeting. As former councilman, the top-end project is important of connecting DeKalb in terms of several goals. We use the word education a lot, and that seems code for double-checking with our residents to ensure we have the buy-in a support it. I don't mind reconfirming with the municipalities, as well the work we're doing with the 2050 plan. We have to have that trust component from the residents to ensure this is what they want to do Z Williams: it seems our next steps will be the municipalities reviewing their plans, coming back with us for a cross-jurisdictional committee to discuss the plan that Mr. Smith presented, and I think that we will all be exploring the funding opportunities.

-LCJ: I believe a cross-jurisdictional committee is exactly what we need to bring that forward. All the municipalities have determined they are on board and will report back within the next 30 days. We will determine the best course of action as a unit. At that time we will engage the necessary parties to develop the roadmap. Then we will engage the public on the roadmap that has been presented by Mr. Smith. We will continue the engagement of all.

Meeting Ended At: 12:38 PM

This agenda item was adjourned meeting

**Yes: 3 - Commissioner Cochran-Johnson, Commissioner Patrick, and
Commissioner Terry**

Barbara H. Sanders-Norwood CCC, CMC