



For Immediate Release
 March 6, 2009

Joint Statement Regarding Abandonment of the Decatur Belt

After 30 days of review and analysis by officials from organizations including the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Beltline, Inc. (ABI), Amtrak, MARTA, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) and the Transit Implementation Board (TIB), these parties have reached a consensus on joint actions to develop and implement a plan to accommodate commuter rail, intercity and high-speed rail service in the region that does not require the use of the Decatur Belt rail corridor. They also agreed to work for another 15 days to document the consensus reached, finalize agreements and secure any necessary board approvals to withdraw the abandonment challenges before the U.S. Surface Transportation Board (STB). The issue of freight and passenger rail capacity in the Atlanta region was also discussed and participants agreed to further develop a framework that assures downtown passenger rail opportunities.

During the review period, two teams met regularly - an Executive Review Committee and a Technical Review Committee, composed of executives and staff from the City of Atlanta, ABI, GDOT, Amtrak, MARTA, ARC, the TIB and others. The Technical Review Committee presented its findings to the Executive Review Committee on March 3rd 2009. Based on that work, the Executive Committee believes that a Western Trunk line modified to increase passenger rail capacity is a viable alternative to the Decatur Belt.

The recommendations of the Technical Review Committee include: formal dismissal of objections to the Decatur Belt abandonment; conducting a statewide freight needs analysis; developing a more detailed analysis and relocation plan of potential Amtrak intermodal stations along the northeast MARTA line; and updating the design for the downtown Multi-Modal Passenger Terminal to include north-south rail passenger platforms to facilitate more efficient operations at the station. GDOT also plans to engage its transportation partners to develop a federally approved rail plan to determine freight line capacity, where freight is moving, potential detour routes of through freight traffic around Atlanta, updated passenger rail plans and provide a mechanism for securing federal funds that are currently available.

Today, the involved parties will jointly inform the STB of the progress they have made in their negotiations. They will also request a 15-day extension of the period during which the STB has agreed to hold all proceedings related to the Decatur Belt in abeyance in order to allow the parties time to formally document the consensus reached, finalize agreements and secure any necessary board approvals to withdraw challenges to the abandonment of the Decatur Belt.

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