

8.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This chapter describes the public involvement activities that were conducted as part of the Tier 1 DEIS.

8.1 Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Plan Summary

A *Public Involvement and Agency Coordination (PIAC) Plan*, based on ABI's *Community Engagement Framework (CEF)* created by City of Atlanta Resolution 06-R-1576 and MARTA's public participation plan, was developed to guide the public involvement process for the Atlanta BeltLine Corridor Environmental Study. The objective of the public participation program is to invite and encourage the public to learn about and become involved in the study. The development of the *PIAC Plan* ensured ongoing public involvement throughout the course of the project using a variety of tools and techniques. The *PIAC Plan* describes how the public, local, state and federal agencies and decision-makers took part in the identification, development, and implementation of the proposed transit and multi-use trails system in the Atlanta BeltLine Corridor. The *PIAC Plan* summary can be found in Appendix E. As noted above, the *PIAC Plan* is based on ABI's CEF and MARTA's Public Participation Plan. The CEF includes a five-part community engagement framework consisting of:

- Tax Allocation District Advisory Committee (TADAC)
- Atlanta BeltLine Affordable Housing Advisory Board (BAHAB)
- Quarterly Updates for the public
- Community Engagement Advocate Office
- Atlanta BeltLine Study Groups

The remaining sections of this Chapter and Appendix E document how the CEF has been an integral part of the EIS public participation process.

Key objectives of the public involvement efforts are to facilitate public understanding, to solicit input on the alternatives, and to identify potential consequences of alternative courses of action relative to the transportation, social, environmental, and economic context. As part of the *PIAC Plan*, the public, federal, state, and local agencies were given the opportunity to review and comment on key project milestone decisions and to provide MARTA in partnership with ABI with the benefit of public insight throughout the project planning and development process.

The *PIAC Plan* was developed in accordance with Section 6002 of Public Law 104-59 "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU), which mandates the development of a coordination plan for all projects for which an EIS is prepared under NEPA. It stipulates opportunity be provided for involvement at key points by the public and agencies.

8.2 Public Involvement Activities

The public, committees, and agencies were engaged on an ongoing basis during the Tier 1 DEIS to provide timely and current feedback, and to ensure that the EIS process is consistent with federal policy regarding public participation. A copy of public involvement outreach activities including public, committee, and agency meetings is included in the *PIAC Plan*.

8.3 Public Involvement: Scoping, Workshops, and Meetings

To date, there have been three major decision points in the process where significant involvement from the public, agencies, and project committees was solicited:

- Fall 2008 Public Scoping process to develop the Purpose and Need as well as Goals and Objectives for the Tier 1 DEIS
- Spring 2009 Public Workshops series to determine the conceptual ROW for transit and trails and identify possible station locations, transit stops, transit and trail routes, and transit service characteristics
- Fall 2009 and 2010 Public Workshops to present progress-to-date and solicit input from the public on the proposed transit and trails alignment and technology alternatives and No Build Alternative

The meetings were conducted in accordance with NEPA guidelines 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508 and 23 CFR Part 771, and all public meetings locations were compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accessible by public transportation.

8.3.1 Fall 2008 Public Scoping Meetings

MARTA in partnership with ABI conducted a number of Public Scoping Meetings during the Scoping process, which began on July 25, 2008 and ended on September 22, 2008. The forums included formal Public Scoping Meetings, as well as other briefings with neighborhood and business organizations to inform the public, interest groups, and involved agencies about the study, the alternatives under consideration, and related issues. The goal was to encourage active participation from the public and agencies early in the decision-making process.

8.3.1.1 Formal Public Scoping Meetings

MARTA in partnership with ABI conducted eight formal Public Scoping Meetings, two in each of the four zones of the study area. A list of the Public Scoping Meeting locations, dates, and number of attendees are listed in Appendix E.

Each of the formal Public Scoping Meetings followed the same format. At each meeting location, attendees signed-in upon arrival and received a Scoping Information Package. Meeting locations included an “open house” area with information boards illustrating the Atlanta BeltLine Corridor; a tiered EIS process overview; the Tier 1 DEIS goals and objectives; and the proposed transit and trails alignments. MARTA and ABI staff was available to answer questions.

Each meeting included a formal presentation with an overview of the project background and Purpose and Need; a summary of the environmental process; an overview of the No-Build and Build Alternatives; and a summary of the key issues associated with project implementation. Following the presentation, members of the public had the opportunity to ask questions and provide input to the Purpose and Need, goals and objectives, alternatives, and their concerns. Attendees had the option of either completing the comment form contained in the Scoping Package at the meeting and dropping it in a comment box or mailing it in prior to the close of the comment period. A record of all attendees and participants was compiled; individuals were added to the overall Tier 1 DEIS mailing list and database.

A court reporter was present to record the public's comments. Reports from the meetings are available from the MARTA Office of Transit System Planning upon request. The *Scoping Summary Report* (December 2008) details the comments and issues raised by the public during the Scoping meetings.

8.3.1.2 Other Meetings Held During Scoping

Prior to, during, and after the formal Public Scoping Meetings, over 46 supplemental progress presentations and stakeholder briefings occurred at regularly scheduled meetings of ABI, community, neighborhood, and business organizations. Information about the Tier 1 DEIS and the proposed project was available at each meeting. The location, date and time, and number of attendees for these meetings are shown in Appendix E. More than 1,928 residents participated in these other meetings.

8.3.1.3 Summary of Public Scoping Comments Received

The formal comment period for Public and Agency Scoping began July 25, 2008 and ended on September 22, 2008. Throughout the Tier 1 DEIS process, comments received during Scoping were reviewed, considered, and used to shape the Purpose and Need, goals and objectives, transit and trail alternatives, and evaluation process (see Appendix E for a summary of Public Scoping comments received). The conceptual transit and trails alignments and transit technologies included in the Tier 1 DEIS reflect the comments received during the formal comment period (summarized in the *Scoping Summary Report* (December 2008)).

Over 300 people submitted approximately 947 comments: 769 were from comment forms distributed during Public Scoping Meetings and briefings and provided on the Atlanta BeltLine project website at that time, www.itsmarta.com/newsroom/BeltLine.html (the current project websites are www.itsmarta.com/BeltLine-Corr.aspx and eis.beltline.org). The *Scoping Summary Report* (December 2008) details the comments and issues raised during the Public Scoping Meetings.

8.3.1.4 Scoping Meeting Advertisement and Notice

Advertisement of the Public Scoping Meetings appeared in the following venues:

- Newspapers: Atlanta Journal-Constitution (August 9, 2008; August 17, 2008) and Atlanta Daily World (August 14-20, 2008)
- Project Websites
- Other Announcements: A Study Update/Flyer printed in English and Spanish was distributed through the contact database, hand-distributed at neighborhood meetings and locations within the community, and placed on the Atlanta BeltLine project websites that advertised the meetings.

8.3.2 Spring 2009 Public Workshops

8.3.2.1 Citywide Conversation on Transit and Trails

MARTA in partnership with ABI conducted a Citywide Conversation on Transit and Trails on April 2, 2009, from 6:00-8:00 PM at the All Saints Episcopal Church (634 West Peachtree Street, Atlanta, GA 30308), inviting members of the Steering Agency Committee (SAC), and the public at-large. The purpose of the meetings was to inform the community of the status of the project, obtain input on Purpose and Need, goals and

objectives, as well as the performance measures and evaluation criteria to be used in assessing the alternatives.

The Citywide Conversation on Transit and Trails included a discussion of the overall Atlanta BeltLine project, the Atlanta BeltLine Corridor Environmental Study, and the environmental study interface with Subarea Master Planning efforts. However, the presentation and subsequent conversation focused on the Evaluation Criteria that would be used to evaluate the project alternatives and upcoming public workshops.

Following the presentation, the attendees (61 in total) divided into groups to review the Purpose and Need, goals and objectives, preliminary evaluation criteria and associated performance measures. The purpose of this exercise was to get a consensus that the right evaluation criteria and performance measures were in use and to insure that there was not an omission of important information. Breakout discussion topics included: study purpose and need; goals and objectives of the project; existing conditions in the corridor; a study update; and, the evaluation criteria and outcomes.

A summary of the list of questions received from participants during the meeting, as well as the feedback received from the breakout session, is provided in Appendix E.

8.3.2.2 Spring 2009 Public Workshop Series

MARTA in partnership with ABI conducted five formal public workshops, one in each of the Atlanta BeltLine Study Group areas: southeast, northeast, southwest, and two distinct groups forming the northwest zone (westside and northside). Public workshops were held between April 13, 2009 and May 4, 2009 to engage the public in identifying appropriate transit technologies and potential transit and multi-use trail alternatives considered for the project.

Promotion of the workshops took place throughout the study area to involve the public, some of whom were previously involved in Atlanta BeltLine planning efforts, through MARTA and ABI outreach methods. Others participated because of a host of outreach strategies designed to reach community, transit and trail users, and stakeholders of the future transit and trails project. These activities resulted in small group hands-on workshops attended by approximately 105 individuals.

A list of the public workshop meeting locations, dates, and number of attendees are listed in Appendix E.

The first portion of the public workshops provided an opportunity for the participants to view a series of display boards and a continuous video that described the various transit and trails improvement options identified in previous studies for the Atlanta BeltLine. A short presentation followed describing the overall Tier 1 DEIS process, results of previous studies, and the purpose of the workshop.

After the presentation, participants formed smaller discussion groups for an interactive exercise focused on identifying potential modifications or additions to the alternative service types, alignments, and station locations previously identified for the Atlanta BeltLine project. Each breakout group included a staff facilitator to lead the discussion, access to an interactive video screen that displayed maps of the proposed project alignment and stations, and a staff person to document the comments and suggestions offered by the group. Following the breakout session, a representative for each group presented a short summary regarding the key points raised by their group.

8.3.2.3 Public Workshop Advertisement

Advertisement for the Public Workshops appeared on the project websites and through a Study Update/Flyer distributed to those listed in the contact database, and hand-distributed at neighborhood meetings, churches, community centers, grocery stores, libraries, businesses and other high traffic locations.

8.3.2.4 Public Workshop Extension

To gain additional feedback from the public, there was an extension on the Public Workshop comment period to June 12, 2009. Additional opportunities to engage the public in identifying transit mode technologies and potential transit and multi-use trail alternatives occurred during 12 public and community organization presentations listed in Appendix E.

Through intensified efforts to engage the public in identifying opportunities and impacts for the transit and trails design, community forums already in place, such as libraries, office complexes and mall food courts received an abbreviated version of the presentation. These activities resulted in attendance of approximately 502 individuals. Staff documented the comments and suggestions offered. A summary of the issues raised during the Public Workshops is provided in Appendix E, and detailed in the *Public and Committee Workshops April-June 2009* report.

8.3.2.5 Post Public Workshop Meetings

The project sponsors continued to introduce the Tier 1 EIS to new audiences and to update audiences that were formerly briefed. During regularly scheduled meetings of community groups and organizations, the project sponsors provided updates to the community to create awareness of the study and to help promote future public meetings. Public comments and input were included in the project record and considered based on the impact to the project. A list of the post workshop briefings can be found in Appendix E.

8.3.2.6 Summary of Public Workshop Comments Received

Recorded and considered in the refinement of alternatives and transit mode technologies were the comments and suggestions from the five Public Workshops. A summary of the comments made during the workshops regarding transit service type, transit alignments, station locations, and trail alignments is available in Appendix E.

The *Public and Committee Workshops April-June 2009* presents a full summary of issues raised by the public during all of the Public Workshops.

8.3.3 Fall 2009 and 2010 Public Meetings

MARTA in partnership with ABI conducted five formal Public Meetings, one in each study area in 2009, and an additional Public Meeting in Fall 2010 to address revisions to Alternatives following FTA comments from the initial version of the Administrative DEIS. A list of the public meeting locations, dates, and number of attendees is in Appendix E.

8.3.3.1 Format and Content

The public meetings provided an opportunity for the participants to view a series of display boards and videos that described and demonstrated the various transit and trail

alternatives. The video presentations at the 2009 and 2010 meetings highlighted potential transit and trail features and provided a “birds-eye view” of the corridor. Also included was the preliminary evaluation and associated methodology of the Build Alternatives for the Atlanta BeltLine. A presentation followed describing the meeting purpose, overall study process, and preliminary results of the evaluation process reviewing how well the alternatives supported the project’s Purpose and Need. After the presentation, the participants broke into smaller discussion groups for an interactive exercise to obtain feedback on the proposed alternatives and evaluation results for the Atlanta BeltLine. Each breakout group included two consultant team members: one to facilitate the discussion and the other to document group feedback.

Comments received from the workshops are detailed in the Public and Committee Meetings November 2009 Report and the Public Meetings December 2010 Report.

8.4 Agency Involvement: Coordination, Committees, and Meetings

SAFETEA-LU requires the identification of Lead, Cooperating, and Participating agencies in the development of an EIS. Under SAFETEA-LU, Lead Agencies must perform the functions that they have traditionally performed in preparing an EIS in accord with 23 CFR 771 and 40 CFR parts 1500-1508. According to CEQ regulations, 40 CFR 1508.5, a Cooperating Agency is any federal agency, other than a Lead Agency, that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in a proposed project or project alternative.

Participating Agencies are those with an interest in the project, invited to comment on the environmental documentation produced as part of the project. Appendix E includes a list of agencies by category designation of Lead, Cooperating, or Participating.

Formation of two committees supported the development of the Tier 1 DEIS: the SAC and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Descriptions of the agency coordination and TAC and SAC committee meetings are provided below.

8.4.1 Lead Agencies and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

Federal, state, and local agencies received invitations to participate and provide comments regarding possible concerns or considerations for the resource areas under their authority. The Lead Agencies for the Atlanta BeltLine Corridor Environmental Study are FTA and MARTA. The Cooperating and Participating agencies are listed in the *PIAC Plan* and Appendix E.

The TAC is composed of representatives of organizations and agencies that have a specific interest and/or responsibility in the Atlanta BeltLine project or that have shown special interest in the redevelopment of the corridor. It included individuals with technical environmental skills and background.

The role of TAC is to provide advice and input regarding methodology and the scoping process and specific guidance on technical matters. By nature of their technical expertise, in some cases there was an invitation to agencies to serve on both the Agency Coordination Group and the TAC. A list of the TAC member organizations is provided in the *PIAC Plan* and Appendix E.

8.4.1.1 Agency/TAC Meetings and Outreach

Agency/TAC Scoping Meeting

MARTA in partnership with ABI invited interested agencies and the TAC to participate in three meetings in the early stage of the Tier 1 DEIS. One meeting served as the kick-off meeting to introduce the Tier 1 DEIS and the proposed project. The other two meetings occurred during the Public Scoping period.

The Scoping meetings held on July 17, 2008 and August 12, 2008 provided an overview of the Tier 1 DEIS and allowed the participants to comment and ask questions on the Purpose and Need, goals and objectives, project alternatives and their potential impacts. On August 22, 2008, interested agencies and the TAC reconvened to respond to the Scoping materials provided at the August 12 meeting. There was also a synopsis of comments made during the formal Public Scoping Meetings. The *Scoping Summary Report (2009)* lists comments of note mentioned during the meeting and responses to the request for comment.

At the Agency Scoping Meetings, attendees reviewed presentation materials provided at the Public Scoping Meetings. After a review of the project and Atlanta BeltLine background, participants had the opportunity to comment on the Tier 1 DEIS and advise MARTA of their issues of concern. The *Scoping Summary Report (2009)* discusses these comments in detail, as well as the responses to comments received. The Agency and TAC members provided comments during the Scoping Meeting. Full detail of comments is listed in Appendix E.

Agency/TAC and Client Group Meeting on the Existing Conditions and Evaluation Criteria

MARTA in partnership with ABI held a meeting on March 23, 2009 with interested agencies and the TAC to review and discuss the results of the analysis of existing conditions in the Atlanta BeltLine study area and evaluation criteria for the alternatives.

The Agency/TAC meeting included; viewing of project display boards, discussion on the purpose of the meeting, presentation on key project milestones, highlights of the *Environmental Effects Report* and evaluation methodology and criteria, discussion on the upcoming public workshops, and review of the next steps in the study process. Following the presentation, the attendees formed two smaller groups to review the evaluation criteria, specifically the performance measures. The purpose of this exercise was to get a consensus that the performance measures aligned with the Goals and Objectives of the project, and any revisions or additions to the evaluation criteria.

Additional Agency/TAC Meetings on Alternative Alignments

MARTA in partnership with ABI held workshops were held with the following agencies to discuss the alternative alignments: Atlanta Development Authority (ADA) staff and Atlanta's Economic Development Sub-Cabinet A on May 28, 2009; TAC workshop on June 2, 2009; and MARTA staff on July 9, 2009. The workshops followed a format that was similar to the Spring 2009 Public Workshops described in Section 8.3.2. The *Public and Committee Workshops April-June 2009* report includes the meeting notes from each of these meetings. Appendix E shows the meetings held with the Agency/TAC in Phases 2 and 3.

Agency/TAC Meetings on Alternatives Evaluation

Meetings were held by MARTA in partnership with ABI to review the methodology and results of the analysis of the transit and trails alternatives, to see how the alternatives supported the project Purpose and Need, how committee and public comments were incorporated into the analysis and to solicit comments and issues from attendees. There were three meetings total: a TAC meeting on November 2, 2009; a TAC meeting on November 30, 2010; and an ADA Economic Development Sub-Cabinet on November 12, 2009. The format and content of the meeting is shown in Appendix E.

8.4.1.2 Notification and Advertisements for Technical Advisory and Agency Committee Workshops

Committee members received email notices two weeks prior to the meetings. Within two days of the meetings committee members were telephoned to confirm attendance.

8.4.2 Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC)

The SAC, composed of representatives from a variety of area organizations, serves a key role in encouraging public participation. The SAC provided ongoing assistance to the project, especially in the outreach component. Representatives from a variety of area organizations, such as the TADAC, MARTA and ABI's network of citizen and business organizations, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups composed the SAC. The SAC provided input and comments on the project findings, and played a key role in generating participation from the public at large. A list of SAC members is provided in the *PIAC Plan* and Appendix E.

8.4.2.1 SAC Meetings and Outreach

Formal SAC Kick-Off Meeting

The kick-off meeting for the SAC, held on July 22, 2008 by MARTA in partnership with ABI, introduced the project, the environmental process, and project milestones, and discussed the role of the SAC. There was also encouragement of the SAC to solicit community participation throughout the Tier 1 DEIS. Twenty-five committee members attended (see Appendix E).

SAC Scoping Meeting

MARTA in partnership with ABI invited the SAC to participate, along with the public, in a series of Scoping Meetings. In preparation for the meetings, the SAC assisted in promoting the series of meetings by distributing meeting notices both electronically and in hard copy within their community, organizations, and area of influence. At the SAC Scoping Meeting, attendees reviewed presentation materials. After a review of the project and Atlanta BeltLine background, participants had the opportunity to comment on the Tier 1 DEIS Purpose and Need, goals and objectives, and advise MARTA of their issues of concern. The *Scoping Summary Report* discusses these comments.

SAC / Spring 2009 Public Workshops

SAC members received email invitations to participate, along with the public, in the five Public Workshops held April 13, 2009 through May 4, 2009. The format of the Public Workshops is provided in Section 8.3.2.

SAC Workshop

A SAC Workshop, held by MARTA in partnership with ABI, took place on June 2, 2009 to review and comment on the alternatives considered. The workshop with the SAC followed a format similar to the Public Workshops described in Section 8.3.2 including a brief presentation and interactive breakout group exercise focused on soliciting comments and suggestions relative to the project alignments, station locations, and service types considered for the Atlanta BeltLine project. The *Public and Committee Workshops April-June 2009* report includes the meeting notes and comments received. Appendix E shows the location of the workshop held with the SAC. Appendix E provides a summary of the input received following the Public Workshops.

Fall 2009 and 2010 SAC Meetings on Alternatives Evaluation

MARTA in partnership with ABI held a SAC meeting on November 2, 2009 and on November 30, 2010 to review the methodology and results of the analysis of the transit and trails alternatives, to see how well the alternatives supported the project Purpose and Need, how committee and public comments were incorporated into the analysis, and to solicit comments and issues from attendees.

8.4.2.2 Notification for Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meetings

SAC members are notified of meetings by way of email notices and telephone notification two weeks prior to the meetings. Within two days of the meetings, phone call reminders encouraged members to attend the meeting.

8.5 Communication Tools

Utilization of a variety of collateral materials and communication tools helped to inform and solicit input from the public and agencies. The communication tools complimented and supplemented the outreach effort. These tools include:

- Stakeholder Contact Database
- Project Websites and Email
- Newsletter
- Study Update
- Telephone Hotline and Business Card
- Media Relations
- Comment Form

8.5.1 Stakeholder Contact Database

The project team developed a master database, which expanded over the course of the project. The database listed interested individuals and groups who desired to keep informed of the progress of the study, and aided in promoting participation at public meetings and notifying the public of key updates to the project website.

The database includes over 850 entries of individuals representing the public, property owners adjacent to the proposed transit and trails alignments, neighborhood planning units, committees, agencies, elected and public officials, civic and community groups, public interest groups, faith-based organizations, and the business community. Updates

to the stakeholder contact database have been ongoing throughout the term of the Tier 1 DEIS.

8.5.2 Project Website and Email

MARTA hosted a website for the Atlanta BeltLine Corridor Environmental Study at www.itsmarta.com/BeltLine-Corr.aspx.

The ABI/Atlanta BeltLine Partnership website also hosted a project website at <http://www.BeltLine.org/BeltLineBasics/TransitTrailsandTransportation/EnvironmentallmpactStudyEIS/tabid/2936/Default.aspx>, which later became eis.beltline.org. ABI also issues blast emails regarding meetings and other events.

Both the MARTA and ABI websites provided information and solicited input on the project. The websites contain a synopsis of the project, frequently asked questions, the Tier 1 DEIS schedule, newsletters, and study updates. They also contain Tier 1 DEIS reports, links to previous relevant studies, as well as contact information and how citizens can get involved. A comment form is available on the MARTA project website. During the project, recording and responding to emailed comments occurred when appropriate. Update of the Comment Summary Database for the project happened as new comments arrived.

8.5.3 Newsletter

The team will have produced and distributed seven newsletters during the course of the study. These publications address major accomplishments in the Tier 1 DEIS as well as upcoming events. Distribution both electronically and in hard copy made the publications accessible to a greater range of people. The newsletters are available on the Atlanta BeltLine project websites.

8.5.4 Study Update

Six study updates will have been produced during the course of the Tier 1 EIS. The updates are comprised of brief summaries of specific developments, primarily of a technical nature, that have been completed. These updates are written in easy to understand language and are suitable for distribution in hard copy and electronically. The study updates are available on the Atlanta BeltLine project websites.

8.5.5 Telephone Hotline and Business Card

A telephone hotline number allowed interested individuals to contact the Tier 1 DEIS team with questions and/or comments regarding the project. The number, (404) 524-2070, links to a recorded message in English and Spanish and remained accessible throughout the course of the Tier 1 DEIS. The Hotline number appears in all printed information materials and on the project websites.

A business card created specifically for the project contains all the contact information, including the website addresses, and hotline number. The procedure for collecting and responding to messages left on the Hotline is contained in the *PIAC Plan*. The Tier 1 DEIS team logs and responds to all telephone inquiries.

8.5.6 Media Relations

Media coverage aided in advertising the study and as a tool to encourage public participation in the development of the Tier 1 DEIS. The *PIAC Plan* contains more than 50 media outlets covered including printed media, radio, television, colleges and universities, and community outlets.

8.5.7 Comment Form

Comment forms, in English and Spanish, are part of the public outreach program. The comment forms solicit responses that pertain to a variety of specific issues as well as general input on the project.

Comment forms were available at all meetings and on the project websites. Distribution of the first comment forms took place at the Public Scoping Meetings, while the second was made available through the Atlanta BeltLine project websites.