

SAPORTAREPORT

New criticism of transit voiced as MARTA eyes proposed line to Emory area

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Randall O'Toole is at it again. Just as MARTA, Atlanta and possibly DeKalb County seem poised to help fund a transit line to the Emory University area, O'Toole – one of the nation's outspoken critics of transit and smart growth policies – is out with new reports saying the transit era is over.

The headline on O'Toole's **piece** in the Nov. 10 edition of wsj.com reads, *It's the Last Stop on the Light-Rail Gravy Train: Mayors want new lines that won't be ready for a decade. Commuters will be in driverless cars by then.*

O'Toole has contended since at least 2009 that driverless cars will be the mobility mode of choice in the near future. He maintains that position in the column:

- “Why walk in the heat or cold for a bus or streetcar when you can hail a driverless car to your door for less money than the transit fare?”

The opinion piece follows up on O'Toole's **policy analysis** released Oct. 24 by the Cato Institute, where O'Toole serves as a senior fellow. Titled *The Coming Transit Apocalypse*, O'Toole observes:

- “It is quite likely that, outside of New York and possibly a handful of other cities, transit as we know it will go extinct within 15 years, and many transit agencies will leave behind a mountain of debt that local taxpayers will be obligated to pay.”

Never let it be said that O'Toole minces words.

O'Toole does not appear to have pontificated on the proposed MARTA rail line to serve Emory University, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other entities along the Clifton Road corridor.

O'Toole's most recent **observation** on metro Atlanta was posted in 2016 by the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, where he serves as an adjunct scholar.

In that piece, O'Toole contended that transit rail will become a white elephant, along with the Atlanta Streetcar. The piece concludes:

- “Instead of planning even more white elephants, MARTA should figure out how it will compete or even survive in the coming era of self-driving mobility.”

The proposed annexation of the Emory area into Atlanta has been a sleeper issue since September. Atlanta and DeKalb County reportedly resolved their differences and Atlanta’s leadership evidently decided to postpone a vote on the annexation until after the Nov. 7 election.

Now, a new wrinkle has appeared. This one is in the form of the 1 percent sales tax DeKalb County voters approved Nov. 7. The construction of transit is an authorized use of tax revenues.

DeKalb officials typically described the purpose of the \$388 million the county expects to collect over six years as paying for road repaving projects and fixing county-owned properties. DeKalb can start work fairly quickly, as voters authorized the sale of \$40 million in bonds to jump-start the process.

In addition to those purposes, the **ballot** specifically authorized proceeds of the sales tax to be used for purposes including the design, construction and acquisition of “public transit, rails, airports, buses....”

Transit does not appear on the **project sheet** that’s been passed around since September. One line item on the sheet provides \$25,550,000 for the purpose of providing: “Federal and State Transportation Project Matching Funds for Transportation Purposes.”

For its part, a MARTA spokesperson said in a Sept. 26 email that, “Presently, the Clifton Corridor project does not have all of the needed local funding which is required to receive matching federal funding.”

Of note, Atlanta officials are so certain the Emory annexation will be approved that the city is planning to build a fire station in an area called the “Emory corridor.” That’s according to one of the **terms** cited in the \$25.7 million bond package the city sold in September.