

MARTA Riders Fight for Right to Ride

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Hundreds of vexed MARTA patrons flocked in droves to the central hub for pedestrian transit transactions, 5 Points station, all uniting in an effort to keep their beloved rail and transit system running at full capacity for the entirety of the week.

This action was taken in response to MARTA officials recently suggesting that a one-day stoppage of rail and bus service during each



"Shutting down the transit service would send the wrong message to convention organizers considering Atlanta," said State Senator Kasim Reed, left, during a conference regarding MARTA's one-day shutdown. (AP Photo/The Atlanta Journal & Constitution, Hyosub Shin)

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week would be a sufficient approach to offset their budget shortfall, currently standing at close to \$24 million, starting July 1st.

MARTA is the only transit system of any national metropolis that does not receive funding, or any other type of financial assistance, from their home state.

"I just feel that it is unreasonable on the part of the local legislature and the Governor to let it fall apart like they are doing," said Sarah Miller, a MARTA rider since its inception. Currently MARTA's revenue stems from sales taxes paid by all transactions made in Fulton and DeKalb counties, respectively. Current law requires for MARTA to put half of their money toward capital costs.

Joining the legions of MARTA employees, riders, and local supporters were local and national political figures. Senator Vincent Ford (D-Atlanta) added peril to the

blatant sense of urgency that was already ominous, hailing the situation as a "state of emergency" while the crowd vocalized their supports for his sentiments by chanting

in any capacity would have terrible consequences for the city. "Shutting down the transit service would send the wrong message to convention organizers consider-



"take the shackles off MARTA."

Arguably the most popular elected official in attendance, State Senator and mayoral candidate Kasim Reed (D-Atlanta) used his position to voice his disdain on the situation by pointing out that disturbing MARTA

ing Atlanta. When Atlanta is competing against Las Vegas, Orlando, Charlotte and other cities that invest in transit systems, what's Atlanta going to say: 'We're off one day-a week?'"

Governor Perdue ordered

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members of his staff to convene with MARTA officials with the goal of avoiding a disruption in rail and bus service. Even so, he didn't feel inclined to order local lawmakers back to the Capitol for an emergency session, citing that MARTA officials chose not to request help from him or any state representative.

Republican leaders have shown solidarity among one another, choosing to side with Governor

Perdue and showing broad support for his stance. Many feel that allowing MARTA to use the entire sum of its money would only provide a "quick fix" for a predicament that is showing signs of having longevity. "If that money is used for operation, there is a chance that we'll be cut off from federal funds," proclaimed State Representative Jill Chambers (R-Atlanta), who is the Chairwoman in the House committee that super-

vises MARTA.

Members of the Atlanta Regional Commission have voiced the desire to provide some proverbial "leg room" for MARTA by funneling federal stimulus funds, about \$25 million worth, into the private entity. The monies are currently allotted for use on other major road and transportation projects in Atlanta. "There are no road projects in our plans in which we could invest \$25 million

and impact so many people. We just hope the Legislature understands that no one will be here to bail them out if they don't fix MARTA's funding situation next year," said Commission Chairman Ted Leithead, who hailed the potential move as "unprecedented" but vital to the thousands of metro Atlantan's who use the transit system from day to day.

With escalating drama marring

any form of coda to this situation, MARTA officials will continue to plead with local legislators and Governor Perdue for a special session to allow the use of their revenue to keep their services running in full force, promising to continue the long-standing battle for control of the private entity that has been waged between the Governor's Office and MARTA for decades.