



Transit

Decatur is in the unique and fortunate position to be very well served by transit. Located within its compact 4.2 square miles are three heavy rail stations, numerous bus routes, and a successful public shuttle service. While not a direct provider of these services, Decatur is also fortunate to share positive and fruitful partnerships with the operating agencies.



Transit is an important component of Decatur's transportation system for several reasons. For one, it can be used as a significant tool in the promotion of biking and walking. When used in combination with these modes, longer trips can be accommodated. It also serves as an important connection to major destination centers in the region such as the City of Atlanta, Perimeter Center,

and Emory University. Equity is also a critical issue, as a large number of transit riders in Decatur depend on the service as their only means of transportation.

As one of the key focal points of the CTP is to create and encourage comparable alternatives to auto travel, this element will focus on the how City can improve connections to transit and identify ways for the City to implement supportive amenities. Specifically, this element uses the baseline of existing transit conditions created in Chapter 3 and examines important issues for future planning such as access, surrounding land use, and target populations. The chapter concludes in recommendations based on the analysis and public input heard as part of the planning process.

Transit Ridership in Decatur

To gain a better sense of those populations that may utilize transit as a means of transportation, demographic data for Decatur was analyzed. This information is important for the CTP to consider as it forms recommendations and prioritizes areas for improvements.

Using data from the 2000 U.S. Census, demographic analysis was conducted at the Census block group level for the City of Decatur on variables relevant to transit ridership. The assessed variables include worker commute mode, household vehicle availability, and household income.

Where possible, Decatur demographic data were compared to MARTA ridership demographic data gleaned from the agency’s 2006 Quality of Service Survey. Data was also compared to Census data from the MARTA service area, comprised of Fulton and DeKalb Counties.

Worker Commute Mode

City of Decatur residents ride public transportation to work with slightly greater frequency than residents of the entire Fulton/DeKalb County MARTA service area. Of all workers over the age of 16 who reside in Decatur, 10.2% use public transportation to get to work. These public transportation riders are split roughly equally between bus and subway. Comparatively, 8.8% of workers residing in Fulton and DeKalb Counties commute via public transportation. While not overwhelming, this slightly higher percentage suggests that Decatur residents utilize transit to a higher degree than other areas served by MARTA.

The spatial distribution of block groups with high frequencies of transit commuting to work can be seen in **Figure 9-1**. Several areas have high levels of commuting via transit. These are located west and south of downtown. In fact, the block group to the west of downtown has the highest transit ridership in the city, with 31% of workers riding transit to work

Household Vehicle Availability

Transit ridership can be a function of whether residents have access to a vehicle. According to the 2006 MARTA Quality of Service study, 57% of respondents cite “No car available” as the reason for using MARTA.

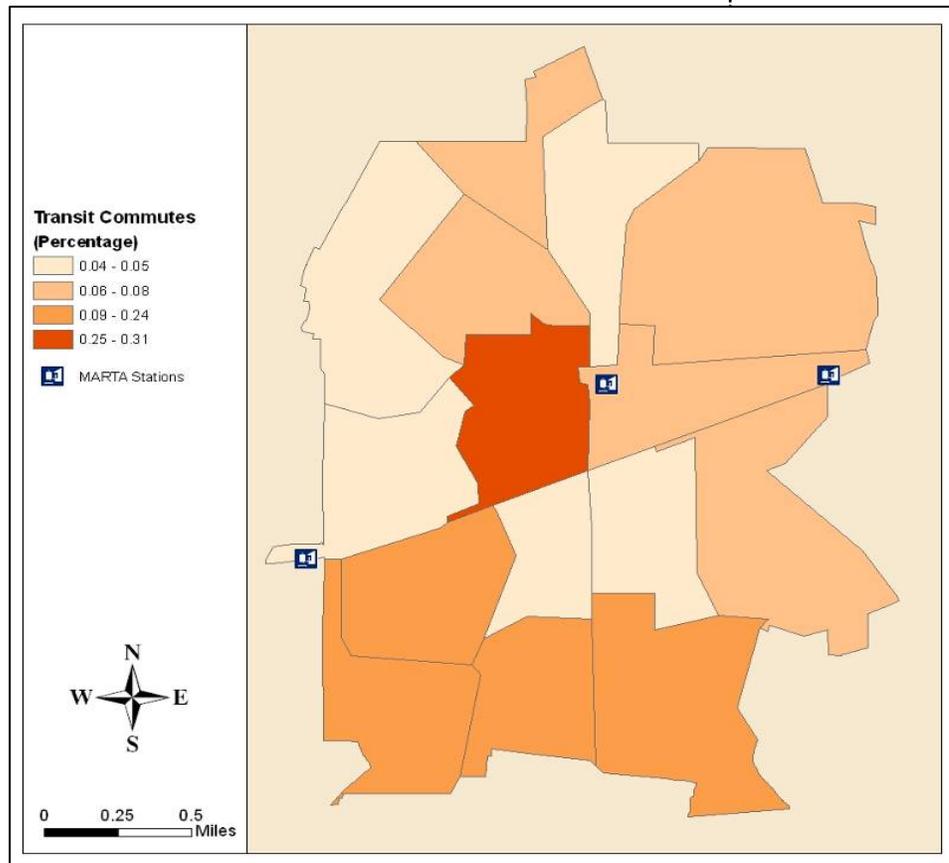


Figure 9-1 Decatur Transit Ridership by Block Group

According to the US Census, 13% of the City’s households has no access to a motor vehicle. Of the 13% of households with no vehicle, 80% are renter-occupied.

In Decatur there are localized areas with relatively high percentage of households with no available vehicle, as displayed in **Figure XX**. Of particular note is the block group west of downtown, where 52% of households have no vehicle available. Additional block groups with relatively high percentages of households with no vehicle available can be seen as well.

Household Income

Household income can suggest transit ridership trends, as income level plays a key factor in determining the amount of money available to spend on transportation. As transportation is a service required by nearly all citizens and transit is often the lowest-cost option, it is highly likely that citizens with lower incomes ride transit more frequently than those with high incomes. Eight-three percent of MARTA riders have household incomes below \$30,000, according to MARTA’s 2006 Quality of Service results.

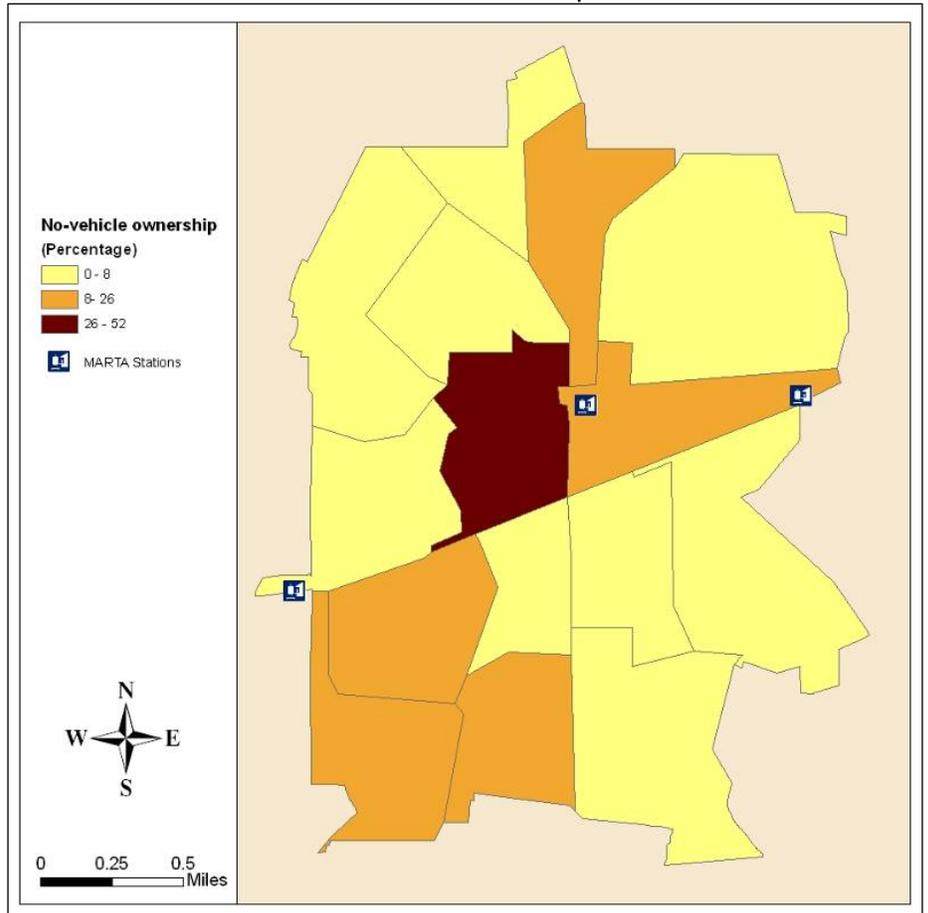


Figure 9-2. Decatur Households With No Vehicle by Block Group

Decatur’s residents represent the complete spectrum of income levels, including a substantial population of low-income households. Thirty percent of Decatur households earn less than \$30,000, 40% earn between \$30,000 and 75,000, and 31% earn above \$75,000.

Table 9-1 Household Income Data for Decatur Residents and MARTA Riders

Household Income	Percent of Decatur Residents (2000)	Percent of MARTA Riders (2006)
Less than \$10,000	10%	22%
\$10,000-\$19,999	10%	28%
\$20,000-\$29,999	10%	33%
\$30,000-\$39,999	11%	8%
\$40,000-\$49,999	9%	3%
\$50,000-\$74,999	18%	3%
75,000 or more	31%	3%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census and 2006 MARTA Quality of Service Survey

As of 1999, when Census data related to poverty was last collected, there are three block groups in Decatur with poverty rates higher than the overall DeKalb County percentage of 16%, as seen in **Figure 9-3**.

Of particular note is the block group west of downtown with a poverty rate of 60%. Additional block groups are located east and southeast of downtown, with respective poverty rates of 16% and 20%.

The data suggests that transit ridership in Decatur is largely a function of income and vehicle ownership rates. The block group directly west of downtown Decatur and adjacent to the Decatur MARTA station shows the highest concentration of ridership, poverty households, and those with no access to cars. This block group is comprised mainly of Decatur Housing Authority units.

Knowing this information informs the recommendations on where to focus improvements in transit-supportive infrastructure and the priority level for implementation.

It is an overall goal to improve access City-wide to transit, but the area west of downtown is an area of special attention, given the concentration of riders and level of reliance on the transit system.

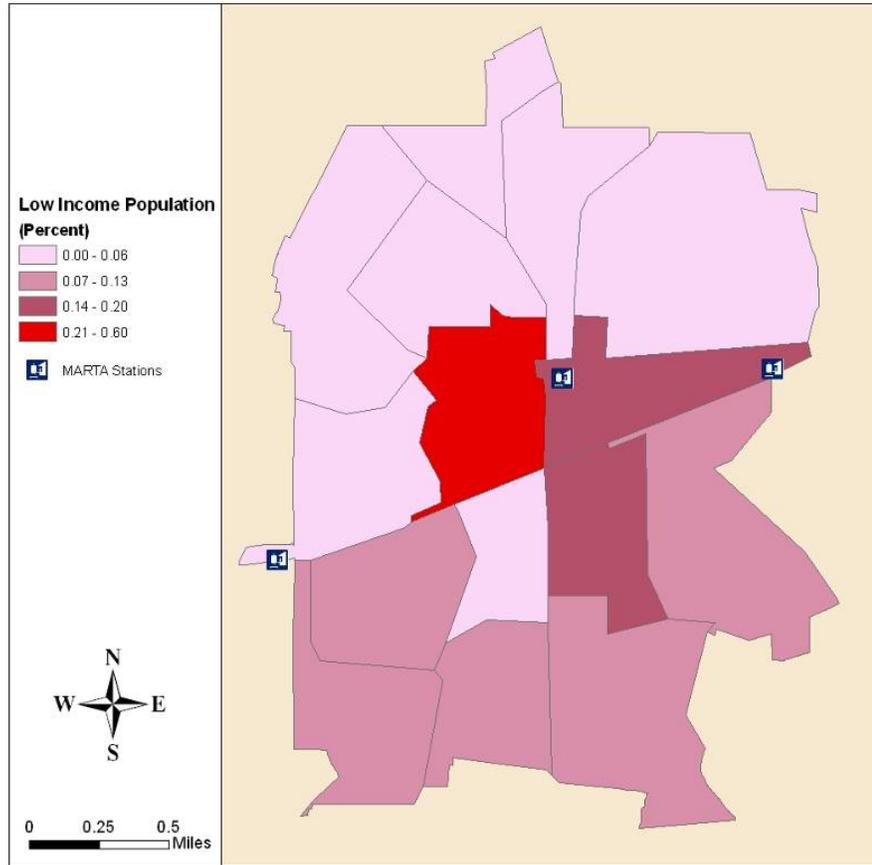


Figure 9-3 Decatur Low Income Populations by Block Group

Pedestrian and Bicycle Access

Providing safe and efficient connections to transit is essential to provide for existing transit users and to also entice trips away from the auto. Pedestrian and bicycling facilities around the three MARTA heavy rail stations were analyzed to assess the conditions in Decatur and make recommendations for improvements.

Pedestrian Access

To help support rail transit within Decatur, pedestrian access needs to be more than just adequate but also encouraging for people to walk to stations.

The goal of this section is to relate the pedestrian connectivity between the MARTA rail stations and their surrounding neighborhoods.

East Lake Station

The East Lake rail station is located between W. Howard and W. College Avenues on the City's western border. The streets and neighborhoods immediately west of the station fall within the City of Atlanta. The East Lake station primarily serves commuter travel and is surrounded by park-and-ride parking lots on both the north and south sides of the station.

The pedestrian conditions surrounding the East Lake station are adequate but underutilized. W. Howard Avenue has a large sidewalk on one side leading up to the station's north entrance. Paden Circle connects the station to East Lake Drive and adjacent neighborhood and also has a wide sidewalk. However the PATH shared-use trail runs immediately next to the station but does not connect to either of the station's entrances. Walkers and cyclists must cross four lanes on W. Howard and back track to the station's entrance.

Access to the south side of the station is similar to the north side. All roads leading to the station have sidewalks. However the primary deterrent to pedestrian access to the south side of the station is the wide roadway and complex crossings along Park Place and East Lake Drive. Both Park Place and East Lake Drive are wide collector roads feeding into arterials, causing both to be an impediment to pedestrian crossings.



Land uses surrounding the station consist of a few older residences and seemingly abandoned administrative buildings. The most significant residential land uses within the one quarter-mile area are a row of townhomes along W. Howard Ave. Other land uses near the station are low-density and none of the surrounding parcels attract or produce significant pedestrian travel.

All neighborhood streets within a half-mile radius have sidewalks on both sides of the street, except for short segments of Hampshire Ave, Devonshire Ave, Melrose Ave, and Bryan Place. These segments are small connecting segments on very low-volume streets. City streets throughout the surrounding neighborhoods are more encouraging for pedestrian use than the major arterials. Sidewalks through these neighborhoods make for a more pleasant walk, particularly to the Oakhurst Central Business District along East Lake Drive.

Decatur Station

The Decatur rail station is significantly different than the other two stations within the city. Located below ground at the heart of the City's historic downtown square, the station is the basis of a lively activity center and is surrounded by vibrant streets and attractive destinations. The station, built in the late 1970s, has served as the focal point of the

City's *Town Center* plan to help revitalized the downtown area during the 1980s and onwards.

Direct access to the station is along Swanton Way to the west and Church Street to the east. Swanton Way is primarily access for buses and riders while Church Street is the main pedestrian access. Both streets have wide, well maintained sidewalks. Around the perimeter of the station, Ponce de Leon Ave, Clairemont Ave, Church St, Trinity Pl, and McDonough St are all within a one quarter-mile radius of the station and all have excellent pedestrian facilities.

The pedestrian environment around the station is very good and highly traveled by both residents and visitors to the city. The station is surrounded by a range of residential, retail, office and institutional uses. The Dekalb County administrative offices, County courthouse, Decatur city hall, a Dekalb County library branch, Agnes Scott College, and numerous small restaurants and retail shops are all located within one quarter-mile of the station.

The station recently completed reconstruction work around the Church St entrance to improve the public plaza area and better connect to surrounding storefronts and streetscapes. A plaza on top of the station at ground level was redesigned to open up the area and provide better access as well as more public space for gathering.



Avondale Station

The Avondale rail station is located due east of the downtown square on Decatur's eastern border. The station is bounded by E. Ponce de Leon Ave and E. College Ave, both of which are major arterials. Avondale, like the East Lake station, is serves primarily commuter traffic and has several large park-and-ride lots adjacent to the station.

Again like the East Lake station, the Avondale station bridges a heavy cargo rail line which bisects the station area. Pedestrian access to the north entrance of the station is at ground level along while a pedestrian bridge connects the southern entrance to E. College Ave and a parking lot.

On the north side of the station, E. Ponce de Leon Ave and Sycamore St provide very pleasant pedestrian facilities. The surrounding neighborhoods and streets have many historic residences, nice tree cover and shade, and well maintained pedestrian facilities. The intersection of E. Ponce de Leon Ave and Sycamore Drive is small and easy to cross. Overall pedestrian access to the north side of the station is very easy.



The south side of the station is a much different pedestrian experience with high traffic volumes, high speeds, and limited pedestrian facilities. The sidewalks along E. College Ave and Sams Street are narrow and primarily provide access to the station’s parking lot areas.

Land uses along E. College Ave and Sams Street are a mix of low-density commercial, some light industrial, and some used car lots. A small private elementary and middle school is located along Sams St. A significant new development has been completed two blocks west on E. College Ave at East Decatur Station. New condominiums have been built due south on Talley St and provide the only residential area within a quarter-mile of the station’s southern entrance.

The parking area on the south side of the Avondale station is slated for redevelopment under the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program. This development will bring more mixed-use residential and commercial density to the south side of the station. New construction in the area provides a prime opportunity to increase pedestrian access to the area by increasing both the quality and quantity of pedestrian facilities.

Pedestrian Overview

The MARTA rail stations located within Decatur are a mixed bag for pedestrians. To their benefit, they are located close to the city and can all be accessed from moderate volume streets. All three stations have at least adequate access by pedestrian facilities, with the Decatur station having excellent infrastructure. However the sidewalks at the East Lake and Avondale stations seem underutilized and suffer from overgrown vegetation and lack of regular maintenance. The biggest obstacle to accessing the East Lake and Avondale stations is crossing major streets at Howard Ave and College Ave.

Pedestrian access to MARTA rail stations within Decatur is not primarily a transportation problem, but rather a land use and development issue. While all three stations have sidewalks, only Decatur has any adjacent destinations for pedestrians. The Decatur station has vibrant surrounding land uses which are reflected in high-quality pedestrian facilities. The Avondale and East Lake stations, however, have little or no adjacent destinations for pedestrians and so naturally the surrounding facilities feel empty and underutilized.



Bicycle Access

East Lake Station

The multi-use PATH facility provides accessibility to East Lake and Avondale MARTA Stations, as it passes by both stations. At East Lake, there is one ramp off of the PATH that allows bicyclists to travel to the station entrance. This ramp is located at the east side of the station, requiring bicyclists from the west to peddle past the entire station in order to reach the station entrance.

Additionally, there are no usable bicycle racks on the north side of the station where the PATH is located. There are, however, bicycle racks on the south side but these are not useful to users of the PATH.

Decatur Station

The PATH facility does not provide access to Decatur Station. Bicycling to Decatur Station via the PATH requires bicyclists to exit at Commerce Drive, McDonough Street, or Church Street and bicycle on-street for approximately three-tenths of a mile. None of these streets have bicycle lanes, though are suitable for bicyclists comfortable with riding in traffic and negotiating lane space with motor vehicles. The new plaza along Church St on the east side of the Decatur station has several newly installed bicycle racks. The racks are a convenient shape for locking but are inadequately sized to support a bicycle at two points on the frame.

Avondale Station

Avondale Station offers bicycle racks on both its north and south sides. At the north station entrance, the PATH facility is an on-street facility as it passes the station and provides direct access for bicyclists. Bicycle access at the south entrance is available by passing through the parking lot area.

Bicycle Overview

Overall accessibility to MARTA stations for cyclists is good, as is facilities for parking. To improve and encourage use of cycling as a connection to transit there must be improvements to the street network surrounding the stations and availability of bicycle racks at the stations. Bicycle lanes or shared-road signage are needed to create clearer and safer links between the PATH and MARTA stations. Also, the public should be educated on MARTA policy and the purpose of new bicycle facilities when they are installed to maximize utilization of the improvements. See the section on “Recommendations” for more details.



Transit Use and Community Health

The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) conducted as part of the CTP focused on studies linking transit services to health, among other topics. A survey of the literature indicates that taking transit is linked to increased levels of physical activity. One study found that Americans who use transit average 19 minutes of daily walking going to and from transit. Thus increasing access to transit could increase the opportunities to be physically active. The study also found that 29 percent of people walking to and from transit achieve the recommended 30 minutes of daily physical activity. In addition, the results of the study indicated that rail users (more so than bus users), minorities, households earning less than \$15,000 annually and people in high-density urban areas were most likely to achieve recommended physical activity levels by walking to transit. These groups were also most likely to suffer from conditions of obesity and overweight (Besser and Dannenberg 2005).

Transit Supportive Land Use in Decatur

While the connection has been largely ignored in the past, planners today cannot discount the effect of land use patterns on the transportation system. This is especially true than in the case of transit. For transit to be truly effective, a dense and compact city form must be in place.

Overall, land use in Decatur includes dense commercial and institutional in the downtown core, mixed commercial and residential along major corridors, and low-density residential in the remaining areas. High-density commercial, institutional, and high-density residential land uses support transit best because they create the critical mass necessary to foster ridership.

The transit station in Decatur best supported by its surrounding land uses is Decatur Station. As can be seen in Figure 9-4, the area around the station is predominantly Commercial land use, Public/Institutional, or High-Density Residential.

Avondale Station is also supported by surrounding land uses, though to a lesser degree. South of the station area, prevalent land uses are Commercial and Public/Institutional, which have the potential to create high densities of transit riders. North of the station, however, is mostly low-density residential.

The station currently includes a large parking lot on its southern entrance. The recommendations in the Avondale MARTA Station Study Livable Centers Initiative plan, adopted by the City in December 2002, call for a much more intensive use of the station area lot, including medium- to high-density residential, employment, and commercial activities. Overall the redevelopment plan, known as the Columbia Park/Avondale MARTA Station Development, calls for 1200+ units of new rental and sales housing, retail and live-work spaces. The Decatur Housing Authority, acting as the developer, is currently working with the City, MARTA and consultant staff to implement Phase I of the LCI plan.

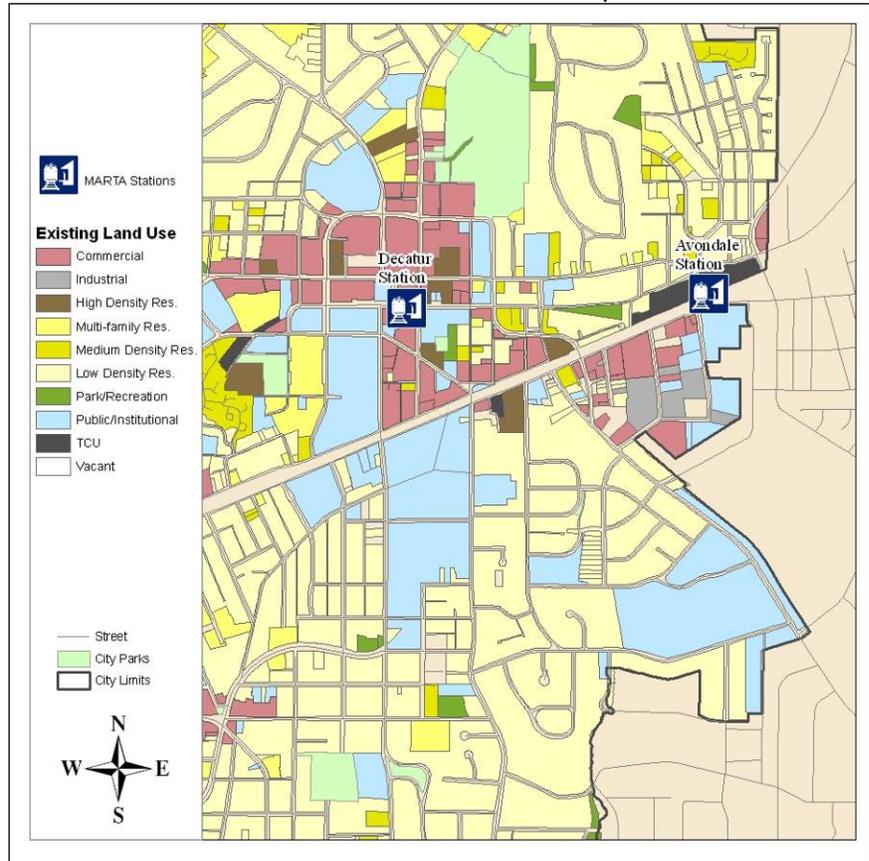


Figure 9-4. Existing Decatur Land Use Near Transit (East)

East Lake MARTA Station, is not as well supported by its surrounding land uses. As can be seen in Figure 9-5 at right, there is very little high-density land use in the area, aside from one commercial area to the southwest.

The land uses described here generally bear out the ridership numbers observed at the transit stations. As mentioned earlier, ridership varies widely between the three stations in Decatur. Avondale Station handles the largest number of average daily trips (6,669), followed by Decatur Station (4,480) and East Lake Station (1,205). Decatur Station easily has the most transit-supportive land uses, though does not have the highest transit ridership. Avondale Station has supportive land uses on the south side of the station, but not on the north side. The likely reason for Avondale’s high ridership is the large amounts of parking which easily accommodates those who park and ride. East Lake Station, with the least amount of high-density commercial or residential land uses surrounding it, correspondingly has a relatively low amount of average daily train ridership.

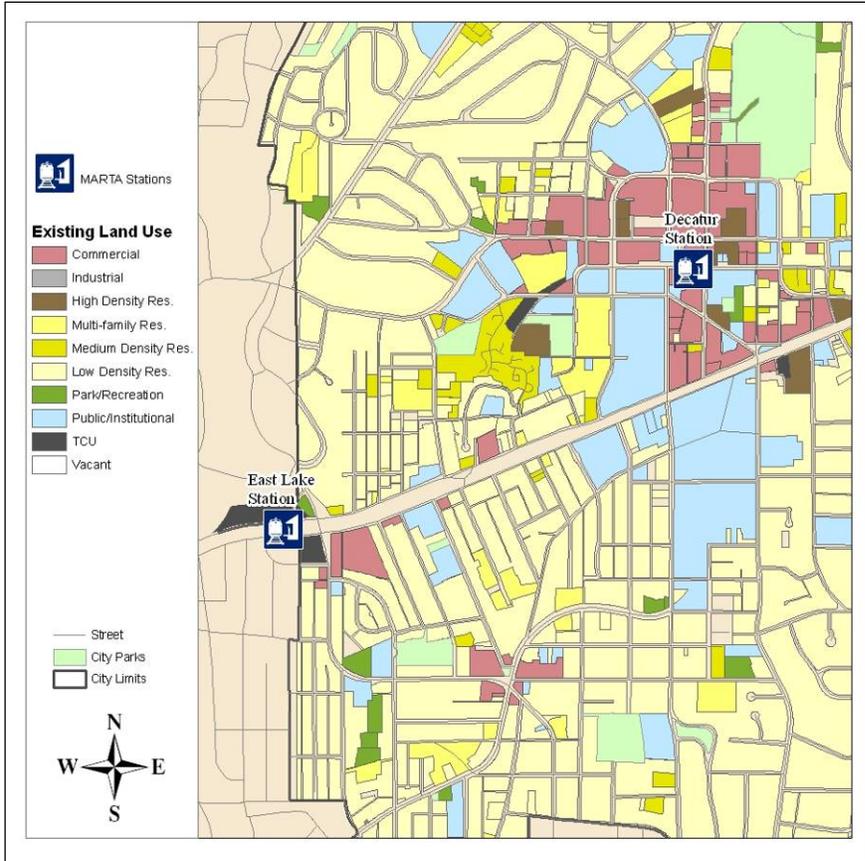


Figure 9-5 Existing Decatur Land Use Near Transit (West)

As seen from the boarding data, high-density land use alone is not enough to facilitate transit use. However, the type and density of redevelopment encouraged by the City is far more conducive to the use of alternative forms of transportation than single-family or single-use commercial districts. Continuing the City’s current development trends of encouraging more intensive land uses is the best practice to support future transit use.

Transit Recommendations

The primary goals of the Community Transportation Plan are safety, accessibility, mobility, and active living. Promoting increased transit use helps to achieve all of these goals plus a wider range of objectives. This section contains recommendations to assist the City in meeting these goals and objectives based on the existing transit conditions in Decatur and public input.

Objective: Safety and Comfort

- Assess conditions at all MARTA bus stops in Decatur and add benches, shelters, and shade trees were needed.

- Sponsor a pilot bus shelter installation program with public art designed by local artists or students.
- Designate area west of downtown Decatur station as priority for implementation of facilities due to high concentration of transit riders.

Objective: Accessibility

- Implement bicycle improvements along transit routes and at stations
- Install bicycle racks at all three MARTA transit stations.
- Add bicycle lanes or shared-use signage to designated corridors that lead to the three MARTA transit stations.
- Install a ramp into the PATH on the west side of the East Lake station to improve bicycle accessibility.
- Implement pedestrian improvements along transit routes and at stations/stops
- Classify sidewalks on streets within 0.5 to 1.0 mile of the three MARTA transit stations as priority zones for potential improvements to promote connectivity and to better accommodate pedestrians with disabilities.
- Ensure access points at train stations and bus stops are ADA-compliant.
- Promote transit-supportive infrastructure and policy
- Implement an “Intra-Decatur” transit shuttle with a circular route to connect peripheral neighborhoods with each other as well as the downtown area. This service could be provided by public agencies such as MARTA or the City of Decatur. Alternatively, it could be provided by a public/private partnership between local businesses and the City.
- Continue to encourage redevelopment plans that include medium to high-density residential and/or commercial in the vicinity of transit stations.

Objective: Education and Advocacy

- Conduct public outreach and education to advertise available transit options
- Coordinate marketing campaigns with local businesses to promote the use of transit to destination areas.
- Coordinate outreach programs with homeowner associations, apartment rental offices, and real estate agents to inform new residents and potential homebuyers of the amenities and benefits of transit in Decatur.

Objective: Interagency Coordination

- Foster and enhance interagency relationships
- Continue to collaborate with MARTA over bus routes and transit stations.
- Continue to collaborate with Emory University and CCTMA to facilitate enhancements to existing shuttle service such as increased number of stops, service headways, and vehicle upgrades.