Introduction

Commuter trains (light rail and trams or streetcars), a fixture in many American cities since the late 19th century, started losing prominence in public transportation calculations in the 1940s with the ascent of the personal car. Vast improvements in public bus services also accelerated their decline. However, in the last 30 years or so, particularly in the early years of the 21st century, there has been renewed interest in this form of transportation across the country, including in the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) member states. This renewed interest has been propelled for a variety of reasons: commuters choosing rail over cars for convenience; easing traffic congestion; reducing air pollution; promoting economic development; and boosting property values. Consequently, multiple metropolitan regions in SLC member states—including in Georgia, Missouri, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia—continue to operate commuter rail systems and expand their operations, even initiating new networks. Given that these initiatives have emerged in transit-starved areas, this increased momentum to introduce or expand commuter rail systems is a direct response to the demands and expectations of businesses and the workforce.

Information on recent efforts in the SLC states to enhance the light rail capacities in their transportation plans, an important cog in any multimodal strategy, is detailed in this SLC Regional Resource.

Atlanta, Georgia

In 1965, the Georgia General Assembly passed the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority Act that, if approved by voters in five metro Atlanta counties (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett), would create a regional transportation agency to oversee a mass transit system serving the Atlanta metropolitan area. The measure was approved by four counties—Clayton, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett—but funding remained a challenge. Six years later, as a result of several political developments and compromises, voters in two of those metro Atlanta counties—Fulton and Dekalb—approved a one-cent sales tax to fund the system and, in 2014, voters in Clayton County also opted to join the system.
In November 2016, voters in the city of Atlanta (in Fulton County) will decide whether to increase their sales taxes by a half-cent over 40 years to raise an estimated $2.5 billion in new revenue dedicated to transportation. While policymakers have not specified the exact spending priorities, some of the projects being discussed include expanded rail routes for the city’s Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), better bus routes, improved technology related to operating the system along with new and enhancements at MARTA rail stations. The impetus for this referendum emerged from SB 369, which passed the Georgia General Assembly in the waning days of the 2016 legislative session and authorized the referendum in the city of Atlanta. As noted by Senator Brandon Beach, Georgia, one of the prime advocates of the bill, “Atlanta is a young city that wants transit; we are ahead of national averages in Millennial and Generation X populations.” Companies either locating to or expanding in Atlanta recently—from Mercedes to State Farm, Kaiser Permanente to NCR, Sage Software to Honeywell—have reiterated that access to transit remained a critical factor in their location decisions.

Along with the MARTA-influenced sales tax referendum, in November 2016, Atlanta voters also will decide on an additional 0.4 percent sales tax increase for other transportation projects. This initiative would allocate funds toward acquiring land to complete the city’s Beltline project, a 22-mile loop of parks, bicycle trails and other amenities linking the city. In addition, it would fund more bike trails, transform roads to be more pedestrian and bike-friendly, renovate sidewalks and coordinate traffic signals. If approved, the additional 0.4 percent increase in the sales tax would extend for five years and generate an estimated $300 million to fund specific transportation projects.

**St. Louis, Missouri**

Momentum to construct a light rail system to serve the Greater St. Louis metropolitan area began in the mid-1980s, with forces coalescing to begin construction in 1990. Deploying unused rail bed and railroad rights-of-way that were expandable, the area’s MetroLink light rail system debuted in July 1993, the first of its kind in the region. At inception, MetroLink operated 16 stations across 14 miles from St. Louis County, Missouri, to St. Clair County, Illinois. In the first three days of MetroLink’s operation, some 180,000 passengers rode the system, a number that ballooned to 1 million riders just in the first month of operation.

Funding for MetroLink came from both the federal government and a local sales tax that was approved overwhelmingly by voters. Specifically, local support originally flowed from June 1973 when the Missouri General Assembly passed the Transportation Sales Tax Act permitting the city of St. Louis and St. Louis County to levy a half-cent sales tax increase for transportation. While the original legislation was to terminate on December 31, 1975, the collection period was extended numerous times in subsequent years before additional legislation removed the sunset provision in 2000. Another referendum in 2010, a time when the Great Recession had the nation gripped by anemic economic growth and rising unemployment, raised an additional half-cent increase in the sales tax in St. Louis County with more than 60 percent of the vote. Given that ridership on the system continues to rise, experts estimate that, since 1993, more than $2 billion in economic development has occurred in the immediate vicinity of the MetroLink system.

MetroLink’s expansion has been steady and, shortly after inauguration, the system added two stations and regular service to Lambert Airport, the St. Louis region’s primary airport. System expansion continued apace and, in 2013, 20 years after its launch, MetroLink had burgeoned to 37 stations along 46 miles of light rail in both Missouri and Illinois. Mirroring light rail trends in many other cities, MetroLink has effective bus connections providing integrated transportation options that, in turn, promote significant economic development.

In June 2016, MetroLink announced that the system was commissioning three feasibility studies of further expansions: a three-station project heading northwest...
from the Blue Line; a one-station project running north from the Red Line; and a six-station project operating south from the Blue Line. The studies will determine which of the routes would be the most likely to qualify for matching federal funds.

**Durham and Orange, North Carolina**

The proposed Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project received a significant boost in February 2016, when the Federal Transit Administration announced that their environmental review was complete and that the critical issues regarding track layout had been resolved. The planned light rail route would be a double track line that extends for 17 miles, anchored by the University of North Carolina Hospital at one end and the Duke University Medical Center, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ Durham VA Medical Center and downtown Durham at the other end. The plan proposes 17 stations and an end-to-end travel time of 42 to 44 minutes. While the light rail trains would be powered by overhead electric wires, the system would start with one or two cars with the option of expanding to three cars. Projected daily ridership by 2040 was estimated at 23,000 passengers, with each car carrying up to 125 passengers and seating 40 to 60 passengers. Service would extend between 5:30 a.m. and midnight daily with trains running every 10 minutes during morning and evening rush hour and every 20 minutes in non-rush hour time periods.

In terms of the project budget estimates, experts have forecasted $1.6 billion, with the federal government funding 50 percent and the state and local governments splitting the remaining 50 percent. Local government officials in Durham and Orange counties had been relying on the state government to cover 25 percent of the cost—as the state did for the light rail line in Charlotte—but the 2015 state budget included a provision that capped state spending at $500,000 for any future light rail projects. This measure was considered a serious impediment to the viability of the project. However, during the 2016 legislative session, the North Carolina General Assembly replaced the $500,000 cap with a state expenditure cap equal to 10 percent of the estimated project cost. The latest legislation also requires resubmission of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project to the state for approval under the forthcoming round of project prioritization. For their part, local government officials confirm that their voters committed a half-cent local sales tax and other local revenues to cover the 25 percent portion of the project costs. Advocates of the light rail system maintain that construction should begin in 2019, with an expected service start date of 2026.

**Charlotte, North Carolina**

The genesis of Charlotte’s LYNX light rail system dates back more than a century and a half when the city’s growth prospects were anchored around the railroad industry. A number of the region’s major railroad companies flourished in and around Charlotte until about the mid-1970s. At that time, a number of other industries (banking, technology, educational institutions, automotive parts manufacturers) ascended in importance resulting in the gradual erosion of the railroad industry’s economic impact. Concurrently, Charlotte and the metropolitan area experienced a massive influx of domestic and foreign migrants. By the mid-1990s, the region’s transportation system groaned under the weight of significant increases in traffic congestion.

In an effort to mitigate the traffic congestion, in 1998, Charlotte city officials sought the approval of voters for a comprehensive regional rail system that involved nine lines spanning 77 miles; the cost in September 1998 was an estimated $467 million. This proposal was soundly defeated. City leaders went back to the drawing board and scaled down their efforts and embarked on a campaign to expand the Charlotte Trolley. They succeeded in this endeavor and the trolley operation served as the basis for the light rail system that would emerge in 2005. City officials also identified, honed in and capitalized on the distinct synergy between rail transit and economic development in the region. In February 2005, construction began on a 9.6-mile light rail system with local sales tax revenues matching investments from the federal government to create a $462 million system. Slightly more than two years after breaking ground, Charlotte’s LYNX system opened in November 2007.

In October 2008, the SLC arranged for four members active on transportation issues in the Georgia General Assembly to travel to Charlotte, North Carolina, for extensive briefings by senior officials with the Charlotte Area Transit System, the LYNX system’s...
Charlotte region’s first light rail service that extends from I-485 at South Boulevard to Uptown Charlotte, a distance of 9.6 miles. The system’s 15 stations include seven park-and-ride locations, and operates seven days a week between 5:26 a.m. and 1:26 a.m. Trains run every 10 minutes during the weekday rush hour and every 15 minutes during the non-rush hours.

In January 2016, crews also started laying track for the $1.16 billion, 9.3-mile Blue Line Extension, the northern leg of the Charlotte LYNX System. In terms of funding for the Blue Line Extension, in September 2015, U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx (mayor of Charlotte from 2009 to 2013) announced a $180 million Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan to the Charlotte Area Transit System for construction of this extension. In addition to the $180 million TIFIA loan, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is providing $580 million for the $1.16 billion project through FTA’s Capital Investment Grant Program. State and local government funding will cover the remaining $400 million required for the completion of this project.

An additional nine stations are planned for an extension stretching between Ninth Street Uptown and the final stop at the University of North Carolina’s Charlotte campus. City officials are optimistic that the deadline of opening the extension to riders by August 2017 will be met, given that testing on the first of 22 new 99,800-pound rail cars already began in early 2016. Of note, the rail cars are an update of the models purchased in 2006 for the original Blue Line (the southern leg of the LYNX System) and will each seat 68 passengers, contain four bike racks and include 10 interior and exterior cameras.

According to estimates, the Blue Line Extension project is slated to create approximately 7,600 jobs and increase ridership by 18,900 passengers per week day. Upon completion, the 18.6-mile light rail corridor (original and extension) in Northeast Charlotte is expected to mitigate some of the region’s traffic congestion problems and enhance economic development in the vicinity of the rail path.

**Nashville, Tennessee**

In August 2016, Nashville officials released a long-awaited and exhaustive transit plan, titled *nMotion*, to mitigate the growing traffic congestion choking Middle Tennessee and accommodate the 1 million additional people estimated to move into the area over the next 25 years. The study solicited input from stakeholders across a broad spectrum over an 18-month period to accomplish multiple objectives:

- Identify major infrastructure enhancements ("think big");
- Establish guidelines for more attainable measures in the short term;
- Consider the regional focus and the desire to envelop local governments outside the jurisdiction of the city of Nashville in these future transit plans; and
- Identify an estimated $6 billion in capital cost expenditures and nearly $339 million in annual operating costs, up from the current $83.2 million.

The study calls for the city of Nashville, in collaboration with regional local governments, to build and develop a large number of high-capacity and rapid transit services including commuter rail, light rail, regional rapid bus and “regular” express bus services, express bus-on-
shoulder services and two bus rapid transit services for surface streets and freeways. In terms of the commuter rail component, the study recommends upgrades to seven-day-a-week service on the Music City Star line that currently runs between Mount Juliet and Nashville, a distance of about 30 miles. In addition, the study proposes a northwest corridor line that would connect Clarksville and Nashville, a distance of about 50 miles.

In terms of light rail, the study recommends an electric rail line in Nashville with exclusive rights-of-way connecting such metropolitan areas as Gallatin Pike, Murfreesboro Pike toward the Nashville International Airport, Nolensville Pike and Charlotte Avenue.

**Dallas, Texas**

The Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) authority manages a variety of transit operations, including light rail and commuter rail. The transit agency completed 20 years of operation in 2016, notching several notable milestones along the way: more than 360 million passenger trips; 90 miles of rail (the longest system in the country); $8 billion dollars in economic impact; and $5 billion dollars in private, transit-oriented development at or near the system’s 62 light rail stations.

When DART was authorized under the Texas Transportation Code in 1983 as a sub-regional transit agency, it was designed to create an extensive network of bus, commuter rail, light rail, paratransit* and vanpool services. The service area covers a swath of metropolitan Dallas that includes 13 cities: Addison, Carrollton, Cockrell Hill, Dallas, Farmers Branch, Garland, Glenn Heights, Highland Park, Irving, Plano, Richardson, Rowlett and University Park.

Funding for DART flows from a one-cent sales and use tax levied on taxable items sold, rented, purchased or acquired for use within the boundaries of the participating municipalities. While this sales and use tax revenue remains the primary source of funding, DART also secures funds from the federal government, investments, fares and other revenue sources. According to a DART official, voters in the cities that belong to DART did so through referendum, and they may discontinue supporting DART financially in the same manner. Specifically, “very early in DART’s history, near its inception, two cities did just that but no other cities have opted out of making the one-cent sales and use tax contribution.” In addition, there has been no high profile effort by any city in recent years to break from the funding status quo. The DART budget for fiscal year 2016 totaled $971.1 million, with $494.9 million in operating expenses, $278.3 million in capital and non-operating expenses, and $197.8 million in debt service expenses.

DART’s rail system comprises four lines—Red, Blue, Green and Orange—covering a number of popular destinations in the city, including the American Airlines Center (the Dallas area’s premier sports and entertainment arena, home to the NHL’s Dallas Stars and NBA’s Dallas Mavericks); airports (DFW International Airport and Dallas Love Field Airport); a variety of local, state and federal court buildings in all the cities served by DART; Fair Park entertainment district (which contains a number of the city’s museums); major medical facilities in Dallas (University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Parkland Hospital, Children’s Medical Center); Dallas Zoo; NorthPark Center (an area that is

*Paratransit services often are provided as a supplement to fixed-route bus and rail systems by public transit agencies on a demand responsive basis for those with disabilities.
considered one of the top five shopping centers in the United States with high-end stores, movie theaters, restaurants, a world-class art collection and a central 1.4-acre landscaped garden), and Southern Methodist University (via the SMU Express).

There are several major capital expansion programs in DART’s Twenty-Year Financial Plan:

» Extending the Blue Line to the University of North Texas’ Dallas campus;
» Lengthening platforms on selected lines from accommodating two-car trains to three-car trains;
» Connecting the two streetcar systems with a central streetcar link to improve circulation; and
» Constructing a second light rail system—to supplement the existing light rail system—once certain thresholds in ridership are met.

Houston, Texas

In 1973, the Texas Legislature authorized the creation of transit agencies in cities across the state. In response, in 1978, Houston area voters created the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) by approving a one-cent sales tax to fund and support its operations. While METRO operates a number of multimodal transit options such as light rail, buses, park-and-ride lots, paratransit and high occupancy vehicle/high occupancy toll (HOV/HOT) lanes, these services extend to 14 major cities in the vicinity of Houston.

METRO’s light rail system comprises three lines: Red (North), Green (East) and Purple (Southeast). In total, the system constitutes 22 miles of rail. After approval in 2003, the light rail system in the Houston area began operating in 2004, with the inauguration of the Red Line. The Red Line, METRO’s longest, a 12.6-mile line, carries approximately 55,000 passengers daily and ranks as one of the nation’s most traveled lines, based on boardings per track mile.

There have been criticisms of the costs associated with building the METRO light rail system, particularly the fact that the addition of the Purple and Green Lines amounted to a staggering $1.4 billion. Critics contend that the per-mile cost of these two lines should have given authorities pause in pursuing their construction. However, there appears to be support for the system. In November 2012, in a ballot initiative, METRO service area voters supported a continuation of the one-cent sales tax collected to fund METRO’s operations through 2025. Over the years, a portion of the funds raised on behalf of METRO has been diverted for non-transit projects such as road, bridge and sidewalk construction. Importantly, the 2012 vote dedicated a greater portion of the sales taxes collected toward METRO, an increase from retaining 75 percent of sales taxes collected to 81 percent of sales taxes toward METRO’s transit operations. METRO’s fiscal year 2016 budget totaled approximately $1.1 billion, comprising a $558.3 million operating budget, $260.2 million capital budget, $172.6 million general mobility budget, and $96.9 million debt service budget.

Virginia Beach, Virginia

The Tide light rail system, serving Virginia Beach, spans 7.4 miles from the Eastern Virginia Medical
Center through downtown Norfolk, along the I-264 corridor to Newtown Road at the border of Virginia Beach. While the system includes 11 stations, it also includes four park-and-ride lots with free parking. When The Tide first was launched in August 2011, Virginia’s first light rail system, it involved a partnership between the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation and city of Norfolk and Hampton Roads Transit (HRT). The Tide’s route encompasses major locations in the Virginia Beach area including Norfolk State University; Harbor Park; City Hall; MacArthur Center; Tidewater Community College (Norfolk Campus); and the Sentara Norfolk General Hospital. The final cost of The Tide was $318.5 million, a number that rated the system, according to Mayor Paul Fraim, “if not the lowest on a per-mile basis of any light rail, it is at the very bottom of the list.” Riding on The Tide currently is free, but beginning in December 2019, passengers can expect to pay a fare for using The Tide.

In November 2016, Virginia Beach residents will vote on a non-binding question on whether the city should extend The Tide by spending local funds. The extension will involve 3.5 miles from Newtown Road to Town Center in Virginia Beach and establish three new stations served by three new light rail vehicles. A $250 million funding package, endorsed by Virginia Governor McAuliffe, has been outlined to facilitate this extension. Advocates for the extension contend it will spur economic development along the route, help lower taxes through a wider tax base, create more opportunities for transit and facilitate regional connectivity. Meanwhile, critics of the light rail system, such as the group No Light Rail in Virginia Beach, assert the entire project has been a waste of scarce public resources and seek to block any expansion. Critics maintain that light rail is “old technology,” costs too much, will not spur economic development nor move sufficient numbers of people to justify the cost. A poll conducted in early October 2016 revealed that Virginia Beach voters are evenly split between supporting the extension and rejecting it.

**Conclusion**

The last three decades have seen a resurgence in the investment of local governments in light rail systems. Given its relatively low cost, shorter project delivery times, fewer complicated engineering challenges (compared to the traditional subway system) and right-of-way issues, light rail continues to be one of the most appealing modes of public transit. In fact, since 1993, not a single city or region has invested in a heavy rail or subway system. In contrast, since the mid-1980s, billions of local, state and federal funds have been devoted to create 650 miles of new light rail in 16 different regions of the country; by late 2014, an additional 144 miles of lines were under construction, at a cost of more than $25 billion. However, several important points have surfaced from these developments: constructing a light rail system does not automatically result in increased transit use; building light rail did develop the inner core of the respective cities and generate significant economic improvements; increases in transit use only are possible when the low costs of driving and parking are addressed; and government and corporate partners need to work closely on building density near transit stations.

**Addendum**

**Streetcar Resurgence**

A number of SLC states also operate streetcar systems, considerably less extensive and expensive than light rail systems. Once again, the reintroduction of streetcars was a revival of a transportation mode that had dominated many American cities beginning in the late 19th century. In many of these cities, streetcars were returning to their downtown areas after an absence spanning more than a half century.

Even with regard to streetcars, there has been a progression toward enhancing the options offered, whether in the form of introducing new systems (Atlanta) or broadening the routes served (New Orleans). A major issue related to streetcars involves whether the locality should set aside a dedicated lane for the streetcar's travel. Proponents of this approach stress that a separate lane ensures that the streetcar is not “stuck” in the same
traffic as the rest of the vehicles. In contrast, opponents maintain that it is not always possible to operate a separate lane, due to space limitations, and because it eliminates parking spaces, reducing opportunities for businesses and commercial operations in the area. The following is a sampling of streetcar projects in the SLC states.

**Little Rock, Arkansas**

The River Rail Streetcar project began operating between Little Rock and North Little Rock in 2004. After the expansion of the system in 2007, the River Rail Streetcar project, also referred to as Metro Streetcar, now covers 3.4 miles. The three historic replica streetcars that ply the route serve an estimated 100,000 riders annually and covers 1,080 miles weekly. When Phase 1 began operations in November 2004 and connected the two downtowns, the cost was $19.6 million; Phase 2 opened in February 2007, a half mile extension to the Clinton Presidential Center, at a cost $7.6 million. While 80 percent of the funding came from federal sources, the remainder was provided by Pulaski County and the cities of Little Rock and North Little Rock. The project is a critical component of a larger redevelopment effort ongoing in the two cities. Several key destinations in the two cities are linked, such as the aforementioned Clinton Presidential Center; headquarters of the global nonprofit Heifer International; North Little Rock’s historic Argenta district; the Little Rock River Market and Creative Corridor; and a variety of tourist destinations including restaurants, hotels, brewpubs, cultural attractions and shops. A number of expansion efforts have been discussed, including an ambitious one to Little Rock’s Bill and Hillary Clinton National Airport.

**Atlanta, Georgia**

In October 2010, the city of Atlanta was notified about a pending federal grant of $47.6 million to set up the Atlanta Streetcar Project connecting the eastern and western portions of the city's downtown. Given that the total budget of the project was $92.6 million, the city leveraged a number of additional sources (municipal and private) to fund the remaining cost of the project ($45 million). A major consideration was the fact that other cities that had introduced streetcar systems (for instance, Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington) experienced a spurt in economic development, increases in property values and other positive externalities in areas surrounding the systems. Estimates by city officials maintain that by 2030, Atlanta will experience an increase of 5.1 million square feet of additional retail space and 4.4 million square feet of new office space as a result of the project. In December 2014, Phase I of the 2.7 miles of the Atlanta Streetcar Project was initiated, with stops at a number of the city’s major tourist, convention and sightseeing attractions such as Centennial Olympic Park; Georgia Aquarium; World of Coca-Cola; Georgia World Congress Center; National Civil and Human Rights Museum; Georgia State University; and the Martin Luther King Historic Site. Along the way, the streetcar stops at 12 locations; it is powered by electricity (overhead) and shares the track with other traffic.

**Tampa, Florida**

While the city operated one of the oldest and earliest electric streetcar systems dating to 1892, by the end of World War II, as in a number of other American cities, Tampa’s streetcars were decommissioned. In more recent years, in 2002, electric streetcars were reintroduced in Tampa, supporting continued growth in the downtown, Channelside and Ybor City areas. Phase I of this reintroduction was a 2.4-mile system that connects these three areas, all designed to improve the region’s transportation capacity and support Tampa’s thriving cruise industry. The original cost for the 2.4 miles of track, vehicles and stations was estimated at $32 million; however, structures and property purchases related to building the system elevated costs to $56 million. State and federal grants, along with local gas tax funds, were used to build the line and stations and purchase the vehicles. Given that operating costs remained a challenge, one of the ways designed to generate revenue involved marketing the naming rights for the 10 stations and eight streetcar vehicles. Consequently, TECO Energy paid $1 million to purchase the naming rights for the entire system.

However, there is a great deal of ongoing discussion about Tampa’s streetcar system’s diminished impact
and measures that need to be initiated to utilize the system to its fullest potential. In particular, officials are concerned about declining ridership, a development that might have been avoided through better service. (Local leaders have long bemoaned the fact that the city’s streetcar system was a poorly managed transit option, expensive and underutilized, a development that resulted in decreased ridership). Renewed interest in downtown development, alongside better, more reliable public transit options, have galvanized the efforts of both public and private entities to create an improved streetcar operation in Tampa. Once again, funding remains an important challenge, and tapping federal sources for the capital cost component of the funds required remains a priority. After accomplishing the short-term goal of utilizing the system to its fullest potential, enhancing operational efficiencies and initiating cost efficiencies, proponents have moved their focus to the long-term goal of expanding the system further through downtown and upgrading to modern streetcars (including track, station and power upgrades). Realizing the latter could cost as much as $120 million.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Cited in famed literary works, New Orleans’ streetcar is the oldest continuously operating streetcar in the world, providing service for more than 150 years. The system operates three different lines: St. Charles, Canal Street, and the Riverfront, each of which originates downtown but travels to different parts of the city. In 2013, the system added a new 1.6-mile Loyola Avenue/Union Passenger Terminal loop, the most recent addition to the city’s growing streetcar network. This $42 million project was initiated to boost development in a corridor of the city that certainly could benefit from an economic rejuvenation.

Kansas City, Missouri

With construction beginning in May 2014, Kansas City’s Streetcar (KC Streetcar) opened for business in May 2016. The system extends for 2.2 miles along Main Street and connects the River Market to Union Station/Crown Center. Along the way, there are 16 stops. Convention attendees can take advantage of the system and access many of the amenities available in downtown Kansas City by using KC Streetcar. Importantly, there is no charge to ride KC Streetcar. Costing $100 million, funds for were raised from a combination of federal and city monies; officials expect daily ridership to average about 2,700. In September 2016, transit advocates submitted a court petition that could eventually lead to further expansion of the current route. These proposals call for proceeding an additional 3.75 miles further south on Main Street from Union Station to near the University of Missouri Kansas City campus.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

The latest city in the SLC region to pursue a streetcar system is Oklahoma City. Even though the city has a lengthy history with streetcars (in 1903, Oklahoma City had a 138-mile system that connected city residents with a number of suburban areas), by the end of World War II, the system folded due to a multitude of reasons. After efforts to reintroduce a streetcar system were initiated in the mid-1990s, the city’s streetcar project progressed in spurts until 2009, when Oklahoma City residents decided to impose a 1 cent sales tax and build a $131 million system. This tax is designed to remain in effect between April 2010 and December 2017. Finally, after years of debate and study, in the fall of 2016, Oklahoma moved on construction of the streetcar project with the goal of launching service in the fall of 2018. While primary service will be on a 4.6 mile main line through the central business district (CBD), a supplemental 2.6 mile line will traverse the CBD and several other key areas in the city: Bricktown, Automobile Alley, Midtown and the area known as Core to Shore. While there will be six modern streetcars, each holding approximately 100 people, service is expected to include operations on Sunday and extended hours during the NBA’s Oklahoma City Thunder basketball games. The planned streetcar routes reflect growing areas of the city and are expected to spur infill development on lots where parking is scarce. In the fall of 2016, four companies, all with extensive commuter rail line and streetcar experience in cities across the United States and globally, submitted proposals to operate the city’s streetcar system.
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Conclusion


Addendum

Little Rock


Tampa


Atlanta


Kansas City


New Orleans


Oklahoma City


This report was prepared by Sujit CanagaRetna, fiscal policy manager and committee liaison of the Economic Development, Transportation & Cultural Affairs Committee of the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC), under the chairmanship of Representative Brent Yonts of Kentucky. This report reflects the body of policy research made available to appointed and elected officials by the Southern Office of The Council of State Governments (CSG).

Located in Atlanta, Georgia, and established in 1959, the Southern Office of CSG fosters intergovernmental cooperation among its 15 member states, predominantly through the services provided by its Southern Legislative Conference. Legislative leadership, members and staff utilize the SLC to identify and produce solutions for the most prevalent and unique state government policy issues facing Southern states. Meanwhile, SLC member outreach in state capitols and coordination of domestic and international delegations, leadership development and staff exchange programs, meetings, and fly-ins by the Southern Office support state policymakers and legislative staff in their work to build a stronger region.

The SLC is a member-driven organization established in 1947 and the largest of four regional conferences of CSG, comprising the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. The Annual Meeting of the Southern Legislative Conference, the premier public policy forum for Southern state legislators, and a broad array of similarly well-established and successful SLC programs—focusing on both existing and emerging state government challenges—provide policymakers diverse opportunities to ask questions of policy experts and share their knowledge with colleagues.