

Transportation

Principles:

- Traffic congestion, while inconvenient, is a sign of a thriving economy.
- Transportation policy must focus on improving mobility and relieving congestion.
- To the extent possible, users should pay.
- Use objective criteria when weighing transportation options.

Recommendations:

- Embrace funding alternatives
- Plan for a future of transportation innovations
- Include Georgia's research universities in solutions.
- Expand the metro Atlanta express toll lanes into a seamless network.
- Improve arterial mobility
- Adopt transit solutions that are flexible and adaptable
- Enhance alternative freight routes around Atlanta
- Develop last-mile solutions

Facts:

Between 1982 and 2014, according to the Texas Transportation Institute¹:

In the Atlanta urban area, which is home to about 60 percent of Georgia's population, the population grew 105 percent but the commuter population increased 171 percent. Daily freeway vehicle miles traveled (VMT) increased 257 percent while arterial road VMTs increased 179 percent.

In the 1980s, Georgia launched a \$1.5 billion, decade-long project that doubled metro Atlanta's interstate lane miles to more than 1,800 lane miles. Freeways, which provided 46 percent of total VMT in 1982, provided 53 percent of VMT by 2014.

The peak-hour delay per auto commuter increased 136 percent from 1982 to 2014, from 22 hours in 1982 (at a cost of \$458 per commuter) to 52 hours in 2014 (costing commuters an average of \$1,130 each). The delays are not only financial but affect the quality of life for motorists in the state's most populous region. The region ranked 13th in the nation for the 2014 cost of peak-hour delay per auto commuter; it was Atlanta's lowest cost since 1997.²

Managed lanes debuted in metro Atlanta in 1994 as high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes legal for vehicles with two or more occupants, alternative-fuel vehicles and motorcycles. The state is in the process of creating an express toll lane network to reduce congestion.

A study from the Brookings Institution notes that just 38 percent of working-age metro Atlanta residents have access to transit, and that only 22 percent of jobs are accessible by transit within 90 minutes.³ In Augusta, just 30 percent of working-age residents had access to transit and only 16 percent of jobs were accessible. Low-income residents without access to transportation lose economic opportunity.

In a 2012 statewide referendum in 12 regions, voters in three regions supported a 10-year, penny special purpose local option sales tax (T-SPLOST) to fund transportation projects within their regions. Legislators returned in 2015 with a Transportation Funding Act to raise more than \$900 million for transportation projects statewide. Among its measures, the new law converted the taxes on motor fuel to a 26 cents statewide excise tax dedicated to transportation; addressed concerns that the

¹ <http://d2dtl5nnlpfr0r.cloudfront.net/tti.tamu.edu/documents/ums/congestion-data/atlanta.pdf>

² <http://d2dtl5nnlpfr0r.cloudfront.net/tti.tamu.edu/documents/ums/congestion-data/atlanta.pdf>

³ <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Series/jobs-and-transit/AtlantaGA.PDF>

regional T-SPLOST proposals were too broad by allowing a county TSPLOST; enabled a fractional sales tax, and imposed a user fee of \$200 for alternative-fuel automobiles.

Ahead of passage of the 2015 Transportation Funding Act, the 2014 Infrastructure Report Card by the American Society of Civil Engineers – an industry funded by infrastructure investment – gave Georgia a C- grade on roads and bridges. It noted that “Georgia needs to increase funding for roads as we continue to be 49th in the nation in per capita transportation funding.”⁴ That Georgia is 49th in spending is not necessarily a bad thing; it also speaks to state transportation leaders spending wisely and prioritizing projects. A 2011 independent survey by the non-profit Transportation Research Board ranked Georgia’s DOT first in the nation in overall on-time, on-budget project delivery – 85 percent of projects since 2001 completed within budget (the national average – 47 percent) and 85 percent on time (national average – 55 percent).⁵

Six percent of workers in metro Atlanta telecommute, which is double the number of commuters who use transit. Nationally, more people take public transportation than telecommute (5.2 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively).⁶

Recommendations:

Embrace funding alternatives

Not every project is an opportunity for a public-private partnership. The ability to use private investors, developers and funding for more investment-friendly projects, however – especially in urban areas – allows policymakers to expedite such projects and redirect taxpayer dollars to projects that are rural, exurban or less attractive to the private sector. Toll roads, toll lanes and toll projects are prime opportunities: Not only does private funding expedite projects, but dynamic tolls help pay for these projects *and* reduce congestion by motivating motorists to gauge the value of their trip route and time.

Contracting out mass transit services has proven to be money-saving for Gwinnett, Cobb and other local governments in Georgia. Outsourcing paratransit and other demand-response systems are another option; increasingly around the nation, local governments are stepping back to hire Uber and similar ride-share services to serve their paratransit needs and save taxpayer dollars.

Plan for a future of transportation innovations

Instead of arguing for costly taxpayer-funded expansion of antiquated modes such as heavy rail, light rail and streetcars that require a lengthy commitment, Georgia policymakers should prepare for the future. Millennials and senior citizens who forego personal vehicles, for example, are likely to eschew bus and rail in favor of taxis and ride-sharing, door-to-door services such as Uber and Lyft and auto rentals by the hour. Instead of handicapping such options with taxes, fees and regulations to perpetuate government’s outdated options, legislators and policymakers should loosen the reins and examine how to facilitate consumers’ private-sector choices.

Autonomous cars will be ubiquitous in a decade and policymakers should be planning how to adapt Georgia’s roads to such commuter technology. Consider how quickly travelers have moved from static, in-car GPS to smartphone-based, real-time and crowd-sourcing apps including Waze, Google Maps, gas price locators, weather apps, and combined-commute apps such as Roadify and OneBusAway, used by Cobb, Gwinnett and MARTA transit authorities. GDOT NaviGator, Georgia’s traffic management system that informs the public via websites, 511 telephone services and overhead bulletin boards, updates only every 15 minutes, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation.

⁴ <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/georgia/georgia-overview/>

⁵ [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/docs/NCHRP20-24\(37\)A\(01\)_FR.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/nchrp/docs/NCHRP20-24(37)A(01)_FR.pdf)

⁶ <http://commuting.blog.ajc.com/2015/10/12/working-from-home-tops-transit-in-atlanta/>

Include Georgia's research universities in solutions

Georgia is already left in the dust as Google and other autonomous “driverless” automobile technologies develop and test in forward-thinking states. Autonomous vehicles, according to insurers, have the potential to reduce rear-end collisions up to 40 percent. Transportation experts also predict they will improve road capacity (allowing closer travel with fewer human-induced collisions) without the need to construct more lanes. “Connected” vehicles react to each other to avoid collisions. Safety improvements are important: In the four years from 2010 to 2013, nearly 5,000 fatalities were reported on Georgia roads.

The next step is to adapt the technology to Georgia – or Georgia to the technology – by cultivating a climate friendly to the innovation, from liability policy to friendly roads. Georgia's research universities should examine the state's road network to recommend mobility applications, including parking, infrastructure standardization, regulatory requirements and locations for demonstration lanes⁷ and pilot projects, as well as considering the mobility possibilities on the state's imminent toll network.

Expand the metro Atlanta express toll lanes into a seamless network

In January 2016, Governor Nathan Deal announced plans to construct express toll lanes on Georgia 400 north and along I-285 nearby. Construction of reversible express toll lanes is already under way along I-75/575 North and I-75 South. The Foundation has long advocated for a seamless network of toll lanes around metro Atlanta.⁸ As stated before, dynamic tolls help pay for these corridors *and* reduce congestion by motivating motorists to gauge the value of their route and timing of their trip. Expanding the lanes to a comprehensive, seamless network provides a guaranteed trip time. Even better, it serves as a virtual transit network – a busway – that facilitates express bus service, improves transit trip times and makes mass transit more attractive and far-reaching for workers across the metro Atlanta area. An added incentive is that Georgia's Peach Pass electronic tolling pass is expanding reciprocity and is currently accepted by North Carolina and Florida.

Improve arterial mobility

Georgia's lack of attention to an arterial network is particularly evident during rush hours and the run-up to vacations. During spring break travel, for example, the interstates across Georgia are clogged; during rush hours, the shortage of viable arterial alternatives clogs the interstates. As the Texas Transportation Institute notes, more than half the daily vehicle miles traveled are on metro Atlanta freeways. Feeder lanes onto the interstate system are often clogged and ineffective, while arterial roads provide a poor alternative in the case of a wreck on the interstate. Over the past 15 years, since the Foundation first pointed out the flaw, some counties have made improvements including better traffic light signalization, longer turn lanes, flashing yellow turn signals and continuous turn lanes. Other arterial lanes, however, have fallen victim to “road diets,” in which sidewalks are widened, medians are built, bicycle lanes are added, speed bumps and humps are inserted and road capacity shrinks. This may be a community or planners' decision but the big picture consequence can be a hindrance to regional mobility and, in some cases, public safety by slowing emergency vehicles.

Adopt transit solutions that are flexible and adaptable

Georgia and metro Atlanta residents must deal with a lack of population density and natural boundaries in an auto-dominant state. Fixed-rail transit solutions that can be more effective, affordable and justifiable in high-density metro areas are not for this state. When expensive options like heavy rail run into financial woes, it has been shown, bus service in low-income neighborhoods becomes the low-hanging fruit sacrificed as transit agencies consider where to trim budgets.⁹ Policy-makers must consider affordable options such as buses, bus rapid transit, shuttles, taxis, last-mile service and ride-share services. For workers, even telecommuting is used more than public transportation. Top-down social engineering motivated by the latest fad from Washington leads to

⁷ <http://www.georgiapolicy.org/2016/04/transits-future-innovation-not-trains/>

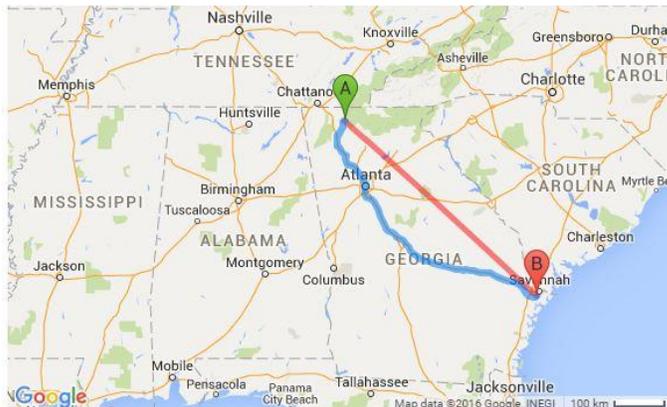
⁸ <http://www.georgiapolicy.org/2004/08/agenda-2005-a-guide-to-the-issues/>

⁹ <http://cityobservatory.org/urban-residents-arent-abandoning-buses-buses-are-abandoning-them/>

costly, ineffective options that do not meet the needs of residents. Two examples are the Atlanta Streetcar¹⁰ and the much-studied Lovejoy-to-Atlanta commuter rail service proposal.¹¹

Develop alternative freight routes

Studies have shown that a large amount of the truck traffic on metro Atlanta interstates are passing through and not destined for Atlanta. The imminent deepening of the Savannah port will increase truck and rail freight in Georgia. Georgia must focus on enhancing roads and limited-access highways to accommodate freight and divert unnecessary freight truck traffic away from metro Atlanta. Redistributing the burden across the region will improve capacity on metro area highways and distribute economic opportunity across the state as truckers relocate and the associated industries and services follow. One example is the intermodal inland port in Murray County opening in 2018 on U.S. 411. Trucks can load and offload containers that make the 388-mile trip between the port and Georgia Port Authority's Garden City Terminal outside Savannah.



Opening in 2018, the Murray County inland port will reduce truck traffic flowing through Atlanta by transporting via rail to and from Savannah's port.

Another example is the Cordele Intermodal Terminal, which will reduce truck traffic in Savannah and Brunswick because cargo can be transferred to and from trains in Cordele. It can also reduce Atlanta-area truck traffic because loads can be broken down and distributed from South Georgia and shipped to southwest Georgia, Southern Alabama and Western Florida.

A third example is the U.S. 27 corridor that parallels the Georgia-Alabama border from Tennessee to Florida and, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation, is 86 percent complete.¹² As a limited-access highway, the road can serve as a viable alternative for truck traffic that avoids Atlanta's congested interstates. It can also help "snow birds" and other leisure travelers from north of Georgia heading to and from Florida to bypass Atlanta.

Develop first- and last-mile solutions for transit

Not every transit user lives or works close to a transit stop; in Georgia, where most of the residential density is low, this is particularly true. A bus stop's service area is typically defined as a quarter mile radius around a stop, roughly equivalent to a five-minute walk. For rapid transit, the distance from a stop increases: up to a mile. The lack of a solution for "last mile" between the stop and the destination is often a deterrent for people who would like transit as a viable choice. Park-and-ride lots at transit stations in the suburbs are crucial, for example, in metro Atlanta. "Kiss-and-ride" drop-off points and corporate and college shuttles to and from stations are among the first-mile and last-mile solutions. At the bus station outside Cumberland Mall in Cobb County, Cobb Community Transit added taxi parking. MARTA partners with the ride-sharing service Uber for similar opportunities.¹³ Allowing Zipcar hourly rentals (car-sharing) and bicycle rentals can be another option.

¹⁰ <http://www.georgiapolicy.org/2014/01/transit-relic-wont-help-transportation/>

¹¹ <http://www.georgiapolicy.org/2005/12/road-to-congestion-relief-paved-with-common-sense/>

¹² <http://www.dot.ga.gov/BuildSmart/programs/documents/GRIP/Facts/US27FactSheet.pdf>

¹³ <https://newsroom.uber.com/us-georgia/uber-marta-connecting-the-last-mile/>