

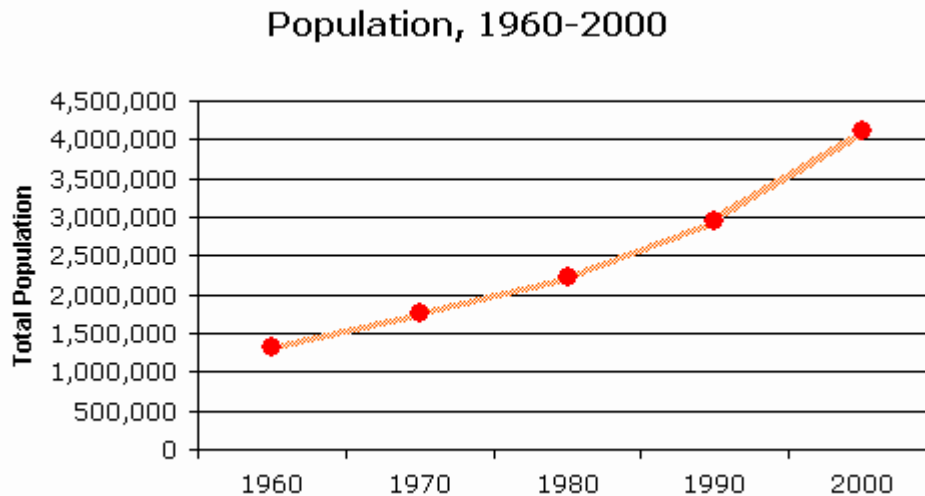
“Why The Rest of Georgia Should Care About Atlanta Choking on Congestion”

1. ***Because growth and congestion is coming to a neighborhood near you, and it is coming sooner than you think.***

At 4.1 million people, Atlanta has the largest metropolitan area in the Southeast. It grew by 38.9 percent in the last 10 years - the fastest growth rate for any city in the region with more than 1 million people. While the City of Atlanta gained population in real numbers from 1990 to 2000, Atlanta's share of the region's growth actually declined 2%. The edge counties of Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb and Gwinnett have grown at a staggering rate since 1950, expanding the boundaries of the metro area. Gwinnett County has experienced the most growth of any County in Georgia, from 32,320 in 1950 to 588,448 in 2000 – growth of 1721%. Clayton, Cobb, and DeKalb Counties followed with 388% to 934% growth. ¹

Atlanta, GA

POPULATION GROWTH



Source: US Census Bureau

Population and employment forecasts provided by the Atlanta Regional Commission show that this trend is expected to continue, with the ever-expanding metro area expected to absorb another 2.4 million people in the 13-county metro area (proposed to be expanded to 20 counties) by the year 2030. But the growth doesn't stop neatly at the jurisdictional boundaries of the Atlanta metro area. The new edge Counties of Hall, Butts, Monroe, Gordon and Floyd are the new growth hot spots as land developers seek open spaces and cheaper land prices for new homes.

¹ Fannie Mae Foundation 2003 “Edge Counties: Metropolitan Growth Engines”

These new bedroom communities, built along existing highway corridors, generate the traffic congestion on Atlanta's roads every day. A study by the Atlanta Regional Commission shows that 72% of workers commute to some other city to work. Norcross for example, in Gwinnett County, increases its daytime population by 250% - the largest increase in the region – and an area with few transportation choices.

2. *Because the decisions we make today about our transportation investments and land use patterns will create the quality of life we and our children will have to live with in the future.*

If we don't change our definition of the problem or our options to solve it, we will continue to get more of what we have been getting: more congestion, more pollution, unbearable time delays, and very high personal and social costs of mobility.

If you ask people *“Do you think that traffic congestion is a significant problem that deserves significant investment?”* Most people would say yes. When the Georgia DOT responds to public demands to fix road congestion problems, their response, as trained highway engineers, is to add capacity to the highways. They might ask you *“How many lanes do you want?”* or *“Should we add a sidewalk to that?”* but the options they give you are a reflection of their road-building experience and not an accurate reflection of the choices available and the true costs and benefits involved for the individual and society.

But if you presented people with a realistic description of choices by asking, *“Would you rather spend a lot of money increasing road capacity to achieve only moderate and temporary reductions in traffic congestion, and deal with increased personal, municipal, social and environmental costs from increased motor vehicle traffic, or would you rather create a more diverse transportation system to avoid such problems?”* the preference for road building would probably disappear.²

Highways consume much more land to build than rail lines require, taking out valuable tree canopies that produce oxygen and cool the land. The environmental impacts of highways are significantly higher than rail: there are more accidents, more pollution, more traffic control and policing, more parking lots required for a road based system than a transit based system.

Highways also generate particular kinds of land uses that feed on car traffic and generate even more traffic: uses like drive-through windows, big box retail, gas stations and strip malls. Transit corridors attract and generate different kinds of land uses: mixed uses in walking distance, sidewalks and bicycle trails, public parks and open space.

3. *Because all Georgians are being asked to pay millions of dollars every year for a transportation system that is going to be more congested in the future than it is today. Congestion cannot be solved with highway widening alone.*

What would we get after spending more than \$1 billion to widen I-75 to 23 lanes? Add another 2.4 million people without any viable options to driving and you will get 23 lanes of gridlock. What would you get after spending \$500 million on reliable rail passenger

² Todd Litman, “Transportation Cost and Benefit Analysis – Application and Case Studies. Victoria Transport Policy Institute.

service in the same corridor? You get happy commuters sitting on a train working on their laptops or reading on their way to work, or to the airport. Add 2.4 million more people to the metro area? No problem! Just add a few more cars to the trains and increase service frequency. The bottom line is that transit, and in particular fixed-guideway rail transit, is less expensive than highways to build and maintain per mile. And this is using the unfair and unequal comparison that includes the cost of the vehicles for a rail system and excludes the private cost of owning and operating a car on the highway system!

For instance, GDOT projects listed on their website on I-75, SR 400 and I-85 in which the costs are described, are detailed below:

* Project 714130-Cobb for I-75N includes 5.14 miles of four-lane HOV facilities at a cost \$563.24M.

* Project 0006417-Cobb for I-75N includes 2.31 miles of two-lane HOV facilities at a cost of \$161.60M.

* Project 0003164-Gwinnett for I-85N includes 13.99 miles of two-lane HOV facilities at a cost of \$225.03M.

* Project 0001759-Clayton for I-75S includes 6.4 miles of two-lane HOV facilities at a cost of \$156.53M.

* Project 0001757 for SR 400 with an estimate of \$282.96M for 17.06 miles of two-lane HOV facilities.

These costs average some \$18.19M per lane-mile.

In most of these corridors there are major expenses identified as separate projects to accommodate the additional through HOV lanes. Examples of supporting projects include:

^ Project 0001919-Cobb for the I-75 / I-575 interchange with an estimate of \$47.00M,

^ Project 713600-Cobb I-75N /Windy Hill Rd interchange for \$339.26M, and

^ Project 0003041-Cobb I-75 / I-285 interchange for \$207.00M.

The cost of the rail passenger service to Cedars Road in Gwinnett is \$311M and includes track, stations and rolling stock. At 36 miles from the downtown Atlanta MMT to Cedars road that is \$8.64 million per mile.

If track alone were shown, the cost is estimated to approximately \$170M, or 4.72 million per mile.

The most current estimate of annual operating assistance for Athens Line service to Cedars Road/Dacula is \$5.4 million, or about \$150K per mile per year.

Creating equivalent peak period highway capacity requires two directional HOV lanes.

Highway lane maintenance has been estimated by the Georgia DOT at \$90K per directional lane mile per year. If the current spike in asphalt and gas costs continues, there will be a permanent and significant increase in this annual expense with a corollary decrease in funds available for system expansion.

Since Express Buses in the Athens Line corridor (US29) cannot operate over HOV facilities, there is little likelihood that patronage approaching that achievable with commuter rail can be accomplished. Nevertheless, if we extrapolate the \$3 million needed to carry approximately 700,000 Express Bus passengers, an Express Bus service carrying similar numbers of riders as that achieved by commuter rail can be forecast to cost between \$20 million and \$25 million per year.

All of Georgia should care about Atlanta's congestion nightmare. We all helped create the problem by living way out and driving in, by thinking that the car is our only choice for the future because it is our only choice in the present. We buy into the transportation investment priorities given to us by maintaining the status quo. We need now to envision a future that is different from the present, or all of Georgia will soon be choking on Atlanta's congestion.