



## NOW IS THE TIME FOR FRESH APPROACHES TO TRANSPORTATION

### Executive Summary

As Georgia wrestles with the best way to spend federal transportation stimulus money made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), it works in an environment that offers unprecedented opportunities and support for change. Game-changing trends make the time ripe for new approaches to transportation, not just for ARRA funding, but for the foreseeable future:

- A trailblazing state study, Investing in Tomorrow's Transportation Today, or IT<sup>3</sup>, shows the way to a fundamentally new, more effective way to spend transportation money.
- A first-ever partnership between the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development to "[help American families gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs.](#)"
- Three ground-breaking plans that show how and where to spend public transportation dollars: [Concept 3](#); [Connect Atlanta](#); and [Atlanta's BeltLine](#).
- A [rapidly graying population](#) in a region designed for young families and driving.
- A federal administration focused on [renewable energy, energy independence](#), and climate change.
- Popular support for increased transportation spending.
- Growing public transportation ridership.

**Emphasis on seven policies** can make the most of this extraordinary opportunity and accelerate positive change for metro Atlanta and the entire state of Georgia:

1. Use ARRA money to **stimulate the economy and advance long-term goals**.
2. **Give preference to repair** of roads, bridges, sidewalks on transit routes and near transit stations, and public transportation rolling stock and routes. Repair projects typically employ more people and put money to work faster.
3. Take advantage of record-breaking transit ridership. **Transit upgrade and expansion** work can create 31% more jobs per dollar than new highway lanes.
4. Invest in **transportation alternatives within and between job centers**.
5. Wherever possible, invest in **projects with multiple benefits**, such as improvements in environment and health as well as mobility and accessibility.
6. Look for **projects that will be increasingly preferred as gas prices rise**. Vulnerability to high oil prices threatens economic growth in a region as spread out as metro Atlanta.
7. Pick projects that **stretch the taxpayer dollar**, such as projects with local dollars to leverage and projects that provide an immediate boost to the state's economy *and* serve long-term local, state, and national economic and security needs.

As Georgia DOT, the Atlanta Regional Commission and others continue to work on ARRA plans, we can and should seek to invest in projects that quickly put people to work; lay the foundation for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century transportation network that makes Georgia a better place to live and do business; and address environmental, energy independence, and national security concerns.

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*Trends urge change and new policy goals show way forward*

As Georgia wrestles with the best way to spend federal transportation stimulus money made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), it works in an environment that offers unprecedented opportunities and support for change. It also works against the backdrop of unprecedented needs.

Four game-changing trends – looming demographic shifts, a new federal administration strongly pushing fresh approaches, a path-breaking study of state transportation priorities and funding, and near consensus politically in Georgia that the state must make measurable progress on transportation or jeopardize economic growth – make the time ripe for new approaches to transportation, not just for ARRA funding, but for the foreseeable future.

Wide leeway in how this ARRA funding can be spent makes “now” the perfect time to use our educated insight to chart a new course. Nine factors capture the mood, analytical thinking, and trends that make 2009 a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine transportation policy and practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

1. A trailblazing state study that shows the way to a fundamentally new, more effective and more efficient way to plan and spend transportation money. Commissioned last year by Gov. Sonny Perdue, *Investing in Tomorrow's Transportation Today*, or IT<sup>3</sup>, lays the foundation for a profound restructuring of Georgia state transportation policy. One of the key strategies endorsed by the study is to increase the density of development and mix of uses in job centers, putting more people closer to jobs, while supporting this development pattern with appropriate multi-modal connective infrastructure.
2. A first-ever project partnership between the U.S. Department of Transportation and Department of Housing and Urban Development to “[help American families gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs](#).” Noting that the average working family in America spends nearly 60 percent of its budget on housing and transportation costs, the two agencies have created a “high-level interagency task force” to coordinate transportation and housing investments (echoing IT<sup>3</sup>'s strategy for metro Atlanta and other Georgia metro areas, above) and find ways to provide:
  - a. More affordable housing opportunities near job opportunities.
  - b. More transportation options, with the goal of lowering transportation costs for working families, cutting travel times, and improving the environment.
  - c. Closer coordination of transportation and land use (development patterns).
  - d. Communities that are safer, healthier, and more livable.
3. Three ground-breaking plans that provide metro Atlanta with unprecedented clarity on how and where to spend public transportation dollars. The area's first “regional transit vision,” [Concept 3](#), was endorsed in 2008 by the Transit Planning Board (now Transit Implementation Board), the Atlanta Regional Commission, Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, and MARTA, giving the region its first unified plan for an area-wide transit system. [Connect Atlanta](#), approved in December 2008, is the City of Atlanta's first comprehensive transportation plan, showing everything from transit to bicycle lane networks and complete streets. Finally, [Atlanta's BeltLine](#) maps the 22-mile corridor of light rail, parks, and pathways intended to serve as a catalyst for renewed economic activity in central Atlanta.

4. A [rapidly graying population](#) in a region designed for young families and driving. By 2030, one in five metro Atlantans will be 60 or older. [Most residents now that age have been in the region for 30 years or more and plan to stay](#), a preference that means many older metro Atlantans will “age in place” in their home communities instead of leaving for retirement communities elsewhere.
5. An administration determined to shift national energy policy toward [renewable energy and energy independence](#). The goal appears important enough to the administration for it to act quickly and risk political capital. Exactly two months after taking office and amid furor over rising deficits, the Obama administration [announced a \\$535 million loan guarantee](#) to help Solyndra, Inc. build a manufacturing plant capable of commercial-scale production of Solyndra’s proprietary cylindrical photovoltaic cells.
6. An administration focused on addressing climate change. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the transportation sector accounts for [nearly one-third of greenhouse gas \(GHG\) emissions](#) in the U.S. and the fastest growing source of GHG emissions. Any new federal climate change statute seems certain to contain provisions addressing transportation, presenting both challenges and opportunities for transportation planning in the coming years. Future state and regional transportation plans will likely be required to quantify and reduce the GHG emissions projected under the plans. Likewise, reducing GHG emissions will likely become a consideration in how federal transportation funds are allocated. The ARRA, for example, includes a \$100 million grant program to fund the capital cost of projects that will reduce GHG. Focusing on projects that reduce GHG emissions will position Georgia to capitalize on this ARRA funding and similar sources as they become available.
7. Popular support for increased funding for transportation may be at an all-time high. Business interests such as the Metro Atlanta Chamber made increased transportation funding their top legislative goal for the 2009 session of the Georgia Assembly. [Get Georgia Moving](#), a coalition formed to push for approval of legislation authorizing a local-option penny sales tax to raise additional revenue, counts more than 100 members.
8. A growing sense among Americans that our roads and other infrastructure are in serious trouble and that it’s important to fix what we have before building more roads. According to a poll released in January by the National Association of Realtors, an overwhelming 80 percent of Americans believe it’s more important that the stimulus funding include efforts to repair existing highways and public transit rather than to build new highways. Repair projects have also been shown to create 16% more jobs<sup>1</sup>, and to do so faster, than those that build new highway capacity. Projects that fall into the “fix-it-first” category are a better investment of stimulus funds, in terms of return, than other road-based projects.
9. Fast-growing public transportation ridership. While the surge in ridership last year was clearly prompted by sky-high gas prices, ridership remains high. Nationwide, transportation ridership in 2008 was the highest it has been in 52 years. [MARTA ridership alone rose 8.6 percent](#) in 2008, according to numbers tracked by the American Public Transportation Association.

Changing habits, demographic shifts, a new federal administration with clear policy objectives on energy and greenhouse gases, an urgent need to restart our national economy, and new resolve by Americans to take the steps needed to put America back on track all combine to make this a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take important steps forward. Emphasis on seven policies can make the most of this extraordinary opportunity and accelerate positive change for metro Atlanta and the entire state of Georgia:

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<sup>1</sup> 2009 University of Massachusetts economic study.

1. Use ARRA money to stimulate the economy *and* to advance long-term goals. Create jobs that advance a quick and lasting economic recovery and reduce household transportation costs, traffic congestion, oil dependency, greenhouse emissions, and vulnerability to gas prices. Projects that repair crumbling roadways and bridges, provide low cost transportation choices, retrofit streets for walking and biking (especially in job centers across the state and around transit stations in places like metro Atlanta), advance energy independence, and put Georgians to work will position Georgia for growth and jump-start construction of the state's 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation network.
2. Fix it first; give preference to repair projects. Repair projects are good long-run investments, employ more, and put more money to work faster<sup>2</sup>. Focus especially on the repair of public transportation rolling stock and routes, sidewalks on transit routes and near transit stations, bridges, and roads. With roads, focus on repair before resurfacing: Resurfacing projects are scheduled to receive a significant share of first-round stimulus money, and [a recent study already ranks Georgia sixth among 50 states](#) in "overall performance" of its roads.
3. Take full advantage of the momentum generated by record-breaking transit ridership. Transit upgrade and expansion projects create 31% more jobs per dollar than new highway lane projects.<sup>3</sup> Expanded and upgraded transit systems, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure around transit stations and in job centers, would allow tens of thousands more people to get back and forth to work, easing pressures on the state's road network. Now is the time to act. Last year's gas scare is fresh in people's minds and commuting patterns have been questioned and disrupted. Now is the time to show Georgians that the state has the will to provide creative alternatives.
4. Invest in transportation options within and between job centers. A primary focus of the state's transportation system is to support Georgia's economy by getting people to and from jobs as efficiently as possible and by making it easier for businesses to move goods and services. By focusing on projects that serve job centers, Georgia can create short term jobs – the jobs needed for the transportation improvements – and provide long-term economic benefit by relieving the transportation congestion that plagues some job centers, adding to the cost of doing business in those areas and threatening their future vitality. By also assuring safe, convenient, and easy pedestrian and bicycle access to transit stations, communities maximize current and planned investments in transit and increase mobility for an increasing percentage of their populations.
5. Wherever possible, work to achieve multiple benefits, such as improvements in environment and health, with transportation investments. With the administration intent on addressing climate threats and increasing energy independence, the tie between the environment and future economic growth is quickly growing stronger. Local benefits, meanwhile, are also clear. Projects that help reduce congestion and improve connections between and inside economic centers will also improve air quality. Again – pick projects whose short-term economic impact also brings a longer-term benefit.
6. Vulnerability to high oil prices threatens economic growth. While both gas prices and the cost of a barrel of oil have fallen sharply from last year's all-time highs, metro Atlanta and Georgia remain vulnerable due to long average commutes and overall numbers of vehicle miles traveled. Projects that reduce that vulnerability will strengthen Georgia's economy now – every dollar not spent on gas is a dollar available for other purchases –

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<sup>2</sup> FHWA: U.S., *Employment Impacts of Highway Infrastructure Investment*, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, p. 2, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/otps/publications.htm>

<sup>3</sup> 2009 University of Massachusetts economic study.

and make it more resilient in the face of future gas shocks and economic downturns. In addition, decreased vulnerability to high oil prices increases U.S. national security.

7. Pick projects that stretch the taxpayer dollar. Projects that provide an immediate boost to the state's economy *and* serve long-term local, state, and national economic and security needs pack twice the punch. Projects that pay twice – paying a short- and long-term dividend – will yield greater overall returns. In addition, special consideration should go to those projects which – in addition to meeting immediate and long-term needs – add local funding to match federal stimulus dollars.

Can metro Atlanta and the state of Georgia find and approve projects that quickly put people to work; lay the foundation for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century transportation network that makes Georgia a better and easier place to do business; and address environmental, energy independence, and national security concerns? Can we afford to do less?