



Friday, November 23, 2007

## 'Connect Atlanta': Yearlong transportation study begins

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Ryan Mahoney](#) Staff Writer

Unprecedented traffic congestion is causing headaches across metro Atlanta, but nowhere is the pain more keenly felt than in the city of Atlanta itself.

A population and construction boom has brought thousands of new residents and workers and millions of visitors to gleaming new office and condo towers, hotels and attractions like the Georgia Aquarium. Roads designed for mere thousands of vehicles swell with tens of thousands at rush hour or during concerts or sporting events.

The city doesn't have a lot of funding for road maintenance and improvements to compensate for all that traffic. Like Cobb and Gwinnett counties, it collects a penny sales tax for transportation; unlike those counties, however, Atlanta spends the entire penny on **MARTA**.

Nor has the city ever had a comprehensive plan to deal with the increased demand on its transportation infrastructure or project where future capacity will be needed. That's largely because, until recently, citizens had been leaving in droves, not flocking back.

Now city officials are moving to develop just such a plan. On Nov. 6, they kicked off a yearlong, \$1.25 million study that will combine input from residents, businesses, commuters and other stakeholders with recent studies.

Heather Alhadeff, the city's transportation planning chief, said that while prior studies dealt only with the needs of certain sections of the city or specific modes of transportation, this new plan will encompass all of them.

The plan, dubbed "Connect Atlanta," will be a bottom-up approach, Alhadeff said.

"There's a lot of skepticism about this," she said. "Atlanta residents are very involved in their individual neighborhood transportation plans, and they have their own opinions about how open and useful the planning process has been in the past. We're just asking people to give us a chance."



Byron E. Small

Kicked off in November: City has never had a comprehensive plan to deal with the increased demand on its transportation infrastructure or project where future capacity will be needed.

[View Larger](#)

Plenty of particularly bad corridors could be in for improvements. Howell Mill Road had been in desperate need of widening since residential and retail developments began replacing industrial facilities years ago.

Piedmont Road in Buckhead is a mess, thanks to new high-rises, the redeveloped Lindbergh Center and a lack of proper connectivity between Interstate 85 and Georgia 400, according to **Georgia Tech** transportation expert Michael Meyer.

West Peachtree and Spring streets in downtown and Midtown aren't any better, he said.

But although the city hasn't been able to spend much on its deteriorating roads because the funding is wrapped up in transit that only a fraction of metro Atlantans use, transit is likely to keep precedence over roads in the new plan.

"The emphasis is on transit," said Paul Moore, a senior associate with **Glattig Jackson Kercher Anglin Inc.** who -- with **Grice & Associates Inc.** and **Jordan, Jones & Goulding Inc.** -- is consulting on the plan. "We're creating a vision of what we want the city to be."

The city is the densest part of metro Atlanta, Meyer said, and in many places simply has no room to add lanes. That leaves transit, complemented by sidewalks and bike paths.

"It's not so much about getting people in from the suburbs as how we circulate within the city itself," Meyer said. "The Beltline's got to be the cornerstone, and the Peachtree trolley too. Beyond that, I suspect it'll be more MARTA circulators."

Some of the circulators could be bound for less crowded corridors, like Marietta Boulevard, Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Moreland Avenue, Northside Drive or Ponce de Leon Avenue, where the city is trying to encourage redevelopment.

That could become a problem when the city presents the plan to the **Atlanta Regional Commission** as justification for project funding. The **Georgia Regional Transportation Authority** has been pressuring the ARC to fund first those projects that relieve road congestion the most.

A lot of the ideas that come out of the plan could depend on funding from a proposed regional penny sales tax that the ARC is pushing to control, Meyer said.

The plan won't neglect the city's rutted roads and jammed intersections, though, Alhadeff said.

Her division is already working with developers to help pay for new medians, turn lanes, traffic signals and other enhancements wherever they throw up new projects.

At 12th & Midtown, the \$2.5 billion mixed-use project by Atlanta-based **Selig Enterprises Inc.** and **Daniel Corp.** of Birmingham, Ala., the developers are reuniting the eastern and western halves of 11th Street where it intersects Peachtree.

Soon, traffic will be able to flow across the city's signature road instead of being forced to turn

onto it, restoring one small piece of Atlanta's limited grid system.

The plan will also look at truck traffic, particularly the thousands of tractor trailers that stream out of **Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport**.

*Reach Mahoney at [rmahoney@bizjournals.com](mailto:rmahoney@bizjournals.com).*

*All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.*