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Chris Leinberger tells Rotarians how Atlanta can become hot again



Maria Saporta (https://saportareport.com/author/maria_saporta/) • April 2, 2012 9:24 pm

By Maria Saporta

Developer and urbanist Chris Leinberger delivered a “wake-up call” Monday at the Rotary Club of Atlanta — “Hot-lanta is no longer hot.”

Leinberger has been coming to Atlanta an average of once a month for the past 30 years, and he’s seen the metro area blossom during the boom times. And now he’s witnessing an Atlanta that is losing ground to such “left wing cities” as Dallas, Houston, Salt Lake City, Denver and Charlotte.

He remembers the developers of the past generation — from Blaine Kelley, Ron Terwilliger, John Williams, John Wieland and Tom Cousins.

“Literally, this has been the most forward looking and progressive real estate community in the country, bar none,” said Leinberger, who also is a senior fellow of the Brookings Institution.

But the current data on metro Atlanta is sobering.

“You have the same number of jobs and the same real capita income as you did in 1998,” Leinberger said. “It’s not a lost decade; it’s a lost 15 years.”

Home prices in metro Atlanta have declined by 29 percent in the last decade, and only three zip codes had gained in value -- Grant Park, Virginia-Highlands and East Lake. 

Brookings has been keeping score. (<https://saportareport.com/>)

(https://www.brookings.edu/reports/2012/0118_global_metro_monitor.aspx) It ranks metro performance of the 200 largest cities in the world. In the 1990s, Atlanta was in the top 25 percent. In the 2000s, Atlanta was ranked 89 out of the 200 largest cities. And today, that rank has dropped to 189.

So why is Atlanta losing ground?

The major reason, as Leinberger sees it, is that the region quit investing in transportation — particularly public transit. Unlike Washington, D.C. and San Francisco (two cities that started building a rail system at the same time as Atlanta), Atlanta has barely expanded its MARTA system and it has not leveraged the economic development potential of developing around its transit stations.

“Transportation drives economic development and real estate development,” Leinberger said. And that’s why Leinberger, who has become a frequent speaker these past few months in Atlanta, has become such a proponent of the July 31 regional transportation referendum that would dedicate a one-percent sales tax to already approved projects.

It’s more than just transportation. Atlanta has been developing for yesterday’s economy — not tomorrow’s economy.

Atlanta needs to create a city where the workers and decision-makers of today’s “knowledge economy” and tomorrow’s “experience economy” want to be, Leinberger said. And those places are “walkable urban” spaces rather than “drivable suburban” spaces.

“That’s why Atlanta has flat-lined,” Leinberger said. It only has five “walkable urban” neighborhoods while Washington, D.C. has more than 40.

So what is an “experience” economy?

“You start with tourism,” Leinberger said. “Now tourism is the biggest industry on the planet.”



About a third of all travelers go ^(<https://saportareport.com/>) explore the wilderness. The remaining 70 percent travel to experience cities, not suburbs. “They are not going to be going through a drive through,” Leinberger said.

Another example of the experience economy is the Apple Store, which is redefining the whole concept of retail. A Macy’s store might have annual sales of \$500 a square foot; Whole Foods has about \$900; a jewelry store can have as much as \$1,500 a square foot.

But an Apple Store is bringing in between \$4,000 and \$6,000 a square foot. And it has trained traditionally low-paid retail sales clerks to become true computer consultants and profit centers in their own right.

So what should Atlanta do to catch up lost ground.

Leinberger provided five suggestions.

1. Pass the July 31 referendum. “It’s the most important investment you will make in the 21st Century. If not, the next town that you will be lapped by is Birmingham,” he said.
2. Fast track the Atlanta BeltLine, which is one of the most important rail projects in the country.
3. Develop at least 25 to 30 more walkable urban places — including such places in the suburbs, and seek to serve at least 85 percent of them with rail transit.
4. Take better advantage of your knowledge-based generators — such as Atlanta’s research universities and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
5. Look at the region as a whole. “This nonsense of outside the perimeter and inside the perimeter has to go,” Leinberger said. “I liken it to a baseball field with an infield and an outfield. You need both,” he said

During his talk, it was clear that Leinberger has developed a strong affection for the Atlanta region. He could have been that disappointed parent or uncle who was talking about a kid with so much unrealized potential.
(<https://saportareport.com/>)

At the end of his remarks, Leinberger wistfully said: “I really want Atlanta to be Hotlanta again.”



(https://saportareport.com/author/maria_saporta/)

Maria Saporta (https://saportareport.com/author/maria_saporta/)

Maria Saporta, Editor, is a longtime Atlanta business, civic and urban affairs journalist with a deep knowledge of our city, our region and state. Since 2008, she has written a weekly column and news stories for the Atlanta Business Chronicle. Prior to that, she spent 27 years with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, becoming its business columnist in 1991. Maria received her Master's degree in urban studies from Georgia State and her Bachelor's degree in journalism from Boston University. Maria was born in Atlanta to European parents and has two young adult children.

PREVIOUS ARTICLE

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(<https://saportareport.com/whats-in-a-name-atlanta-beltline-brand-takes-in-many-transit-projects/>)

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55 Comments



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 2, 2012 11:05 pm

“Leinberger has been coming to Atlanta an average of once a month for the past 30 years, and he’s seen the metro area blossom during the boom times. And now he’s witnessing an Atlanta that is losing ground to such “left wing cities” as Dallas, Houston, Salt Lake City, Denver and Charlotte.”



By all accounts, Atlanta (Inside the Perimeter) is a “left wing city”, it’s just that the government of the state that it is located in is increasingly corrupt and spectacularly incompetent.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



Burroughston Broch • April 3, 2012 7:09 pm

@The Last Democrat in Georgia Under the old mayors (Ivan Allen and predecessors) Atlanta government was corrupt but competent, and things generally worked. It was corrupt because government is always corrupt – it’s people spending someone else’s money. Under the new mayors (Sam Massell and successors) Atlanta government is monumentally corrupt and incompetent, and nothing works.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 12:58 am

@Burroughston Broch

“Atlanta government is monumentally corrupt and incompetent, and nothing works.”

That pretty much puts Atlanta in the same class as cities like Miami, Detroit, New Orleans, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago, San Diego, etc, all major cities with incredibly corrupt central city governments historically.

Though it should be noted that not all corrupt city governments are created equal as the same kind of corruption that sunny oceanside cities with perfect climates like Miami and San Diego can get away with and still attract newcomers and tourists by the planeload may send longtime residents fleeing in droves in cold, rusted-out snowbelt cities like Detroit.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



inatl • April 4, 2012 10:09 am

@Burroughston Broch @The Last Democrat in Georgia The state legislators are even worse. At least the city of atlanta is getting the Beltline done and got the only transit investment in the region via the auburn street line.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 10:21 am

@inatl @Burroughston Broch
"The state legislators are even worse."



You're being very, very nice as that is a VAST UNDERSTATEMENT. Not only are Georgia state legislators worse, they are arguably the WORST state legislators in the entire country as that survey pretty much confirmed what we all pretty much knew, which is that the Georgia State Legislature is the most corrupt state legislature in the country with virtually no enforcement of ethics laws, ethics laws which have been pretty much gutted away so that legislators could take as much money and gifts (free meals, five-star hotel stays, tickets to sporting events, overseas trips and even sexual favors) from lobbyists representing big mega corporate interests and special interests as their warped little hearts desire with no fear of official sanction or rebuke.

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Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 2, 2012 11:16 pm

"So why is Atlanta losing ground?.....The major reason, as Leinberger sees it, is that the region quit investing in transportation — particularly public transit. Unlike Washington, D.C. and San Francisco (two cities that started building a rail system at the same time as Atlanta), Atlanta has barely expanded its MARTA system and it has not leveraged the economic development potential of developing around its transit stations."

Couldn't agree more.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 2, 2012 11:18 pm

"Transportation drives economic development and real estate development," Leinberger said."

That's a fact that seems to have been lost on the geniuses in government around these parts.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 2, 2012 11:21 pm

"And that's why Leinberger, who has become a frequent speaker these past few months in Atlanta, has become such a proponent of the July 31 regional transportation referendum that would dedicate a one-percent sales tax to already approved projects."

I don't necessarily agree that the regional transportation tax is the preferred way to go about making things better from a transportation standpoint, but I definitely agree that something urgently needs to be done to get this town back on the right track.

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(<https://saportareport.com/>)

inatl • April 3, 2012 5:50 pm

@The Last Democrat in Georgia I agree. The list of projects don't offer much game changers except for the Beltline. And based on Jacob's comments today it could be that the they aren't going to build some of the proposed transit lines anyway due to lack of operating funds. Meanwhile the road expansions are dramatic.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 2, 2012 11:30 pm

"Atlanta needs to create a city where the workers and decision-makers of today's "knowledge economy" and tomorrow's "experience economy" want to be, Leinberger said. And those places are "walkable urban" spaces rather than "drivable suburban" spaces."

More like "impassable" or "undrivable suburban spaces", especially during morning and evening rush hours, which drives home the point even more.

Who wants to relocate to an undrivable suburban metropolis where everything (services, amenities, entertainment, nightlife, social institutions, etc) is tens-of-miles away through impassable traffic on unnavigable surface streets and roads?

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Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 2, 2012 11:42 pm

"That's why Atlanta has flat-lined," Leinberger said. It only has five "walkable urban" neighborhoods while Washington, D.C. has more than 40."

Metro and Greater Atlanta as a whole can gain even more highly-desired walkable neighborhoods including in the most seemingly unlikely of places, the suburbs, if the state ever get its act together and get the long overdue critically-needed exurban-to-urban core commuter rail service up-and-running.

Surburban cities, towns and villages like Vinings, Smyrna, Marietta, Kennesaw, Acworth, Woodstock, Holly Springs and Canton in the I-75/I-575 Northwest Metro Corridor and Chamblee, Doraville, Norcross, Duluth, Lawrenceville, Dacula, Suwanee, Sugar Hill, Buford, Flowery Branch, Oakwood, etc in the I-85 are just bursting at the seams to have a rail transit line (preferably commuter rail) run through their neck-of-the-woods and help make give their towns more of a walkable small town community feeling that towns are looking for in the midst of the rise of the "New Suburbanism", just like urban neighborhoods Inside the Perimeter are inspired by the rise of the "New Urbanism".

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Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 2, 2012 11:43 pm

(<https://saportareport.com/>)

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Reply

Report



ATLpeace • April 3, 2012 10:30 am

Maria, excellent article! I am glad to see that Leinberger stated: “You start with tourism... Now tourism is the biggest industry on the planet.” I too envision Atlanta’s future and destiny tied in with tourism (our state could even acquire the nickname of “Georgia: The Peace State”). And I especially enjoyed learning this following perspective from the International Institute For Peace Through Tourism (IIPT.org). They proclaim that: “the world’s biggest peace industry is tourism!” Atlanta currently has the world’s busiest airport with almost 100 million annual passengers. Do you know anyone who can help us connect with Sir Richard Branson? Our organization would like to convince him to launch one of his Virgin Galactic Spaceships from our airport so that it can then become “The World’s First Commercial Spaceport for Peace!” Accomplishing this will propel the Peace Millennium worldwide. Don’t you think this would be a fitting tribute in the birth-city of Dr. King, one of Earth’s most respected and accomplished Nobel Peace Prize Laureates? The virtue of peace was tied into travel many, many years ago. Way back in 1869, Mark Twain stated (from ‘Innocents Abroad’)... “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of people and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the Earth all one’s lifetime.”

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Reply

Report



Floyd the Barber • April 4, 2012 9:38 am

Before we get all googly-eyed about our local developers, lets remember they are the same people that never embraced mixed-use development around MARTA stations and town centers until way late in the game. They may deserve credit for their political leadership in the region, but not the form of their development. That form reinforced auto dependency and helped create one of the worst commuting and land-use patterns in the country.
 (https://saportareport.com/)

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Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 10:51 am

@Floyd the Barber

Very good point as Atlanta has literally been known as “The International Poster Child for Automobile-driven Sprawl” over the last decade-and-a-half, even moreso than Los Angeles, which has long been the poster child for sprawl in its own right since the end of World War II but has been increasing in density as of late with the total buildout of the Los Angeles Basin which occurred sometime around the year 2000, meaning there’s been almost nowhere to build but up over the last decade making a legendarily automobile-dominated town embrace the density that it had so long abhorred. L.A.’s notorious traffic congestion problems have also forced Southern California to invest more in retrofitting the car-dominated city with transit in the form of heavy rail subways, light rail and commuter rail trains along with increased express bus service.

Though in all fairness, Houston more than likely has Atlanta beat when it comes to a totally automobile-dominated mindset as transit of any kind is pretty much an afterthought in that town that has been on the ultimate roadbuilding binge over the last decade or so, especially when it comes to toll roads as Houston has close to a dozen different major toll roads, even converting busy heavily-developed surface roads into toll roads.

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Reply

Report



inatl • April 4, 2012 10:13 am

So we are going to agree to tax ourselves for road projects, i suspect there is a chamber tie in for the plug for the regressive transportation tax. Bottom line the transit won’t all get built. and the region could care less about walkable communities or alternative transportation so why give them more money for roads? Fox 5 had a story to day about GDOT and the Gov moving forward with the conversion of the bus lanes on 400 to car lanes. These lanes which were done with much influence by the old GRTA were funded with CMAQ dollars and required special legislation. Taking them away is a step back from trying to get meaningful transit options to the suburbs that promote walkable communities.

Just vote no to the uber regressive transportation sales tax.

http://www.myfoxatlanta.com/dpp/news/local_news/Plan-Would-Allow-Cars-in-Ga.-400-Emergency-Lane-20120403-pm-pk (http://www.myfoxatlanta.com/dpp/news/local_news/Plan-Would-Allow-Cars-in-Ga.-400-Emergency-Lane-20120403-pm-pk)

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



inatl • April 4, 2012 10:26 am

http://www.grta.org/board_calender/2003_Minutes/PP/031203_minutes.pdf

(http://www.grta.org/board_calender/2003_Minutes/PP/031203_minutes.pdf) GRTA will be contributing \$2.8 million of CMAQ funds to widen the shoulders and GDOT will provide \$18.5 million. SB 256, which amends Georgia law to allow buses to operate in emergency lanes, was introduced on March 6, 2003. Formal Action: Motion was made by Mr. Shailendra and seconded by Ms. Baylis to approve support for changes in state law to permit bus operations within the emergency lanes of state highways in the non-attainment areas. The motion was approved unanimously.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



inatl • April 4, 2012 10:27 am

GRTA Press release on the bus lanes. FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE March 12, 2003 Contact William Mecke (404) 463-3011 Bus on Shoulder System to Operate on GA400 GRTA Express Buses to Utilize Shoulders ATLANTA – Mirroring a system successfully used on 200 miles of highway shoulders in Minneapolis-St. Paul, express buses running on Georgia 400 will travel along the shoulders bypassing stop-and-roll traffic. The Bus-on-Shoulder System is a concept introduced by the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) through its Northern Sub-Area Study/GA 400 Corridor Analysis and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). “Identifying cost-effective ways to increase the usefulness of our highways and improving mobility is important, both in the Atlanta region and throughout the state,” said Governor Purdue. “I congratulate GDOT and GRTA for developing this inventive solution for improved transit along the Georgia 400 corridor.” GRTA and GDOT are working together to reinforce where necessary the outside shoulders of GA400 in order to support express buses traveling from Forsyth County and/or the MARTA Windward Parkway Park and Ride lot to the MARTA North Springs rail station. The program is part of a series of improvements to Georgia 400 currently being made by GDOT. “Minneapolis’ experience shows us that this is a successful method for gaining additional use from existing transportation infrastructure,” said Jim Ritchey, GRTA acting executive director. “Between exists, the buses run on the outside shoulder of the road and then merge back into the regular traffic stream at exits and at other places where necessary. The people on the buses get the advantage of using an express lane. The taxpayers get an express bus lane at a fraction of the cost of building such a lane. On top of that, the buses will help reduce the number of cars on Georgia 400, thus reducing congestion on that heavily-traveled road.” MARTA’s North Fulton County buses could take advantage of the program, as well as GRTA’s Regional Express Bus. The GA 400 shoulder reinforcements, as well as a number of other intersection improvements in the GA 400 corridor identified by GRTA’s Northern Sub-Area Study/GA 400 Corridor Analysis, will be constructed by GDOT over the next 18 months.

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Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 11:37 am

@inatl

The conversion of the shoulders on Hwy 400 from peak hour bus lanes to peak hour general-purpose traffic lanes is a result of the politics of desperation in more ways than one.

When I heard Governor Deal bring up the idea back in January, I didn’t necessarily think that the idea would go anywhere, so I am surprised that the idea is actually moving forward in that right.

Though I can live with using the shoulders for bus service, I don’t necessarily like the idea of using emergency shoulders for any type of consistent traffic use, especially as general-purpose traffic lanes, but I do at least glean a speck of understanding of the political desperation to make it appear that a state government that is widely viewed as being totally and completely absolutely hapless on transportation matters is doing SOMETHING, anything about traffic.

Basically, this is a political move by Governor Deal to appeal to a bloc of voters in North Fulton that he has trouble with in the last election as North Fulton and Cobb County support for Karen Handel in the 2010 GOP Gubernatorial Primary that Nathan Deal won on the strength of collecting more votes out of super-suburb mega-county Gwinnett and the I-85-985/GA316 Northeast Georgia Corridor than anywhere else in the state.

The wild startup and implementation of the I-85 HOT lane back in October of 2011 could possibly give Governor Deal some problems in the I-85 Northeast Corridor, the heaviest-populated corridor of Republican voters in the state, in the next GOP Gubernatorial Primary in 2014, so in an effort to try and compensate for the political support that he may lose in the critical I-85 Northeast Corridor, Governor Deal is aiming to pickup more Republican support in the GA 400 North Corridors by opening up the shoulders to traffic on a road that cannot physically or politically be widened on GA 400 and installing reversible toll lanes (HOT lanes) on I-75 and I-575 through politically-crucial Cobb and Cherokee Counties which together with Paulding County makeup the second-largest voting bloc of Republican voters in the state after the I-85 Northeast Corridor.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 11:46 am

@inatl

Despite the nagging need to invest more in mass transit from the suburbs to the city, you've also got to realize that there are many more voters who drive than use transit, especially from the affluent suburbs of North Fulton and Forsyth Counties that depend heavily on Hwy 400 during morning and evening peak hours.

In opening up the shoulders to all traffic during rush hours Governor Deal is making a direct appeal to those voters in cars, the overwhelming majority of whom are Republican voters, in North Fulton and Forsyth Counties that he absolutely must have to win the GOP Gubernatorial Primary in his bid for re-election in 2014, especially since heavily-populated Gwinnett doesn't necessarily look to be a sure thing at this point after the flawed startup of the I-85 HOT lanes made traffic worse in the Northeast Corridor.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



inatl • April 4, 2012 1:00 pm

@The Last Democrat in Georgia I can see the politics, though that just adds to the frustration if it works.

Its a huge step backwards.

On one hand they want me to pay an extra 1% on my gallon of milk to fund the GRTA Xpress service up 400 but on the other they are crippling the most effective tool the bus service has for attracting ridership (congestion avoidance).

This why I'm shifting to the belief that the only hope for the region is to keep transportation funding limited and thus continue the recent trend where people start making housing decisions that are less car dependent.

At least if they were doing a HOT lane they could provide for congestion free bus service to the North Springs MARTA Ramps. Converting the shoulders to general purpose lanes makes building HOT lanes more difficult.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 1:33 pm

@inatl

Opening up the shoulders to all traffic during rush hours is not necessarily a long-term fix as there are plans to expand the MARTA heavy rail line up to at least Windward Parkway. There are also plans to build HOT lanes elevated above the right-of-way of the road since the road cannot necessarily be physically expanded horizontally without great political cost due to the density of existing development and the very popular tree buffer that lines both sides of the road through some heavily-residential areas.

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Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 1:49 pm

@inatl

It's just that politically, opening up the shoulders to all traffic is something that can be done right now as the rail transit lines and HOT lanes are projects that will take many years to get off the ground and complete.

Also, Governor Deal is going to do something to make up for the votes that he could very well likely lose out of the Gwinnett-anchored I-85 Northeast Corridor after the HOT lanes on I-85 made traffic even worse than it was before, which made unhappy voters even more disgruntled in a county hit by a series of recent very costly government scandals and missteps in Gwinnett.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

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Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 4, 2012 2:27 pm

@inatl

"This why I'm shifting to the belief that the only hope for the region is to keep transportation funding limited and thus continue the recent trend where people start making housing decisions that are less car dependent."

I wouldn't necessarily advocate for keeping transportation funding limited, especially in a state (the 9th most-populated state in the union) that is basically in last place (dead last) in the union in transportation funding for both roads and rails.

Besides, you don't need to keep transportation funding limited to motivate people to make housing and lifestyle decisions that are less car/auto-dependent as people are already looking, often desperately, for living and commuting options that don't involve them sitting in a single-occupant automobile for hours-and-hours on end every week. Even people that live in sprawling suburban and exurban neighborhoods are looking alternative commuting options to the single-occupant automobile and the twice-daily commutes from hell that have resulted from a lethal combination of overdependency on driving and decreasing transportation funding in what has been one of the fastest-growing states in the union over the last three decades.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



optimystic • April 5, 2012 1:54 pm

I'm an urban planner and this is the most biased, irresponsible report on Atlanta that I've seen in a long time! Did the advocates of the July 31st Transportation Referendum hire the guy to spit out this nonsense? Leinberger starts off by correctly mentioning Atlanta is losing ground to the likes of cities such as Houston, Dallas and Charlotte who've invested minimally in mass transit (Dallas more so than the others, but nothing compared to the scale of Marta in it's current state). Then he goes on to advocate the Beltline and further transit investment as the cure to all ills.

This is Atlanta's major problem — trying to be a San Francisco or Washington D.C. type metro when in fact we have more in common other sprawling Sunbelt cities who are currently experiencing tremendous growth and prosperity. The main reason I will not vote for the TSPLOST is because of it's more than 50% focus on mass transit. The beltline should not even be in this conversation! The overwhelming majority of citizens in our region have already decided that they do not want to live in the urban utopia that Leinberger is championing here. Sure, he casually mentions the need to dismantle the "Inside the Perimeter vs Outside the Perimeter" mindset, however he is clearly being disingenuous in trying to garner suburban support for Atlanta's ITP transit desires. Vote NO!

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 5, 2012 10:00 pm

@optimystic

"This is Atlanta's major problem — trying to be a San Francisco or Washington D.C. type metro when in fact we have more in common other sprawling Sunbelt cities who are currently experiencing tremendous growth and prosperity."

But the with the major exceptions of Houston and Orlando who have and are continuing to invest heavily in a massive road expansion strategy, even some of the other sprawling Sunbelt cities who either have (Los Angeles) or are (Phoenix, Dallas, Raleigh-Durham and the aforementioned Charlotte, which is actually losing ground to Raleigh) currently experiencing growth and prosperity are either already investing heavily in mass transit or are making plans to invest heavily in mass transit in the not-too-distant future.

Dallas in particular, while having a rail transit network that has received some limited criticism, has built 106 miles of rail transit track (72 miles of light rail track and 34 miles of commuter rail track) in a shorter time frame than MARTA who only has 48 miles of rail transit track, has been operating.

I agree that a regional T-SPLOST is not likely the best way to fund the beltline, which is much more of a real estate and economic development project than a congestion relief project and also should be funded with a City of Atlanta voter referendum and the revenues from the fares on the light rail line that will traverse most of the distance of the Beltline and with revenues from the property taxes from the new development that will locate along the length of the long-term developmental project.

As quite a few others have remarked, I also don't like the fact that voter-fueled T-SPLOST is being used to fund critically-needed transportation improvements that should be funded with increased gas taxes the Republican-led State Legislature is too timid to approve out of a deathly fear of the conservative "no-tax increase for anything ever, no matter how Important" mantra, which in this particular case of so many overwhelming transportation needs has likely become extremely counterproductive.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 5, 2012 11:50 pm



@optimystic
(<https://saportareport.com/>)

“The main reason I will not vote for the TSPLOST is because of it’s more than 50% focus on mass transit”

I don’t agree with the use of a T-SPLOST needing voter approval to fund critically-needed transportation improvements that will still need to be done regardless of whether voters approve the tax and do the job that our juvenile, infantile and highly-dysfunctional State Legislature is too afraid, too incompetent and just downright refuses to do themselves instead of pushing the issue, and the blame for either the success or failure of the tax, off on the voters.

While improvements to mass transit can be funded through means other than a new sales tax, there definitely needs to be increased investment in mass transit in an Atlanta Region with gridlocked surface roads and freeways with little or no room physically or politically for the type of massive road expansions that we were able to successfully resort to in the past, a strategy of massive road expansion that should have included a heavy mass transit component in hindsight.

“The overwhelming majority of citizens in our region have already decided that they do not want to live in the urban utopia that Leinberger is championing here.”

You are correct. Despite notable growth in Intown and ITP neighborhoods in recent years, the overwhelming amount of population growth over the last four decades has occurred in North Metro Counties, most notably the suburban and exurban counties of Paulding, Cherokee, Forsyth, Hall and, especially, Cobb, North Fulton and Gwinnett Counties. But despite the heavily auto-centric nature of those suburban and exurban areas, those communities, in addition to increased funds for long-overdue road-widenings and modifications, are also in dire need of increased mass transit options, not necessarily in the form of MARTA-style heavy rail and local bus transit routes, but in the form of high-frequency commuter rail service in existing freight rail right-of-ways and increased express commuter bus service between those suburbs and exurbs and the urban core.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



denkon • April 6, 2012 5:32 pm

@optimystic Sure Optimystic, you are an urban planner. Prove it and I will consider your anti-TSPLOST screed in a more positive light.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 6, 2012 12:43 am

“Developer and urbanist Chris Leinberger delivered a “wake-up call” Monday at the Rotary Club of Atlanta — “Hot-lanta is no longer hot.””

Well, no sh*t! With sky-high unemployment, an unfathomable record amount of foreclosures, daily traffic jams out of the seventh level of hell, a comically inept state government in which corruption runs RAMPANT and an overall rapidly-declining quality-of-life, I can’t possibly see how Mr. Leinberger could have ever arrived at that shocking revelation.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Report

Report



(<https://saportareport.com/>)

demircii0 • April 7, 2012 9:10 am

@shumachergroup <http://t.co/n0wpixj> (<https://t.co/n0wpixj>)

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



BillEvelyn • April 9, 2012 6:46 am

This is misleading at best, but more like propaganda. "HOTlanta is Coldlanta due to the housing market. 40% of homeowners are underwater on their mortgages and prices of homes are back to pre-2000 levels. TSPLOST will only help to destroy the economy, because it removes private wealth and transfers it into the government. Politicians can't fix traffic problems, they can only confiscate wealth pandering to special interests.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 4:10 pm

@BillEvelyn

"TSPLOST will only help to destroy the economy, because it removes private wealth and transfers it into the government."

Compelled (and sometimes FORCED) transferring of private wealth from private citizens to the government is what all taxes and ALL government revenues are based upon as there would be no government without the taxes and revenue that it compels everyone to give to it in the form of income taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, fines and fees.

Like you sir, I hate being "compelled" to give away my money to an often inefficient and sometimes totally corrupt government as much as the next man or woman does, but that still does not change the fact that despite consistently being in the top five in population growth rates over the last couple of decades, the State of Georgia has fallen into second-to-last place in transportation investment.

Granted, I'm not all that enamored with how it is setup, especially in the way that it lumps road improvements, rail expansions, traffic congestion relief and real estate development projects all into one regionwide referendum when it might be much more effective to pay for each separately, this forthcoming \$6 billion T-SPLOST is still just a very small drop in the bucket compared to the estimated \$50 billion-plus in almost overwhelming transportation needs.

Numerous transportation NEEDS that include freeway interchanges in dire need of reconstruction to be able to handle increasingly heavy volumes of traffic (I-285/GA 400 North, I-285/I-20 West, I-285/I-75 South, I-285/I-20 East, I-85/I-985 Northeast, I-85/I-285 Northeast), CRITICALLY-needed expanded rail and bus transit service (a long-past-due network of exurban-to-urban core commuter rail lines, a rail transit subway line across the Top End of I-285, a MARTA rail transit line to Emory University, etc), surface roads in need of either expansion or intersection modifications.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



(https://saportareport.com/) inatl • April 9, 2012 4:38 pm

@The Last Democrat in Georgia @BillEvelyn Or instead of flushing more tax dollars down the toilet by trying to pave our way out of congestion we could stop driving more than almost any other metro region in the country.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 7:02 pm

@inatl @BillEvelyn

Since the big “Freeing-the-Freeways” project of the 1980’s, with the possible exception of the opening of GA 400 in the early 1990’s, the state hasn’t really done all that much to attempt to pave our way out of congestion. I can’t really in good conscious deride the major freeway widening project of the 1980’s because in my opinion it was a very good project in bringing the freeway system up to date with the demands of THAT TIME (late 80’s, circa-1990 when the population of the Atlanta Region was only just under HALF of what it is today).

The biggest flaw of the “Freeing-the-Freeways” project was that it didn’t include a major regional mass transit component both in the form of express commuter buses and, especially, high-frequency commuter rail service between the exurbs and the urban core. The “Freeing-the-Freeways” project only served to bring the freeway system up to a level-of-service that was able to accommodate the estimated three million people living in Metro Atlanta at that time, NOT the three million more people that would move into the Atlanta Region over the next 20 years or so after the project was completed.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 7:05 pm

@inatl @BillEvelyn

As we are now seeing first hand, it would have been very difficult physically and almost downright impossible politically to expand the freeway system to accommodate the three million more people that have moved into the metro area since the completion of the widening and reconstruction of the freeway system back in the late 1980’s, which underscores the importance of a viable regional mass transit network all the more.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 7:40 pm

@inatl @BillEvelyn

Another major flaw of the "Freeing-the-Freeways" project was that the state didn't quite properly address the surface road network at the same time that they were doing the major widening and reconstruction of the freeway network. Granted, at the time of the completion of the freeway widening project, it was still theoretically possible to have built an Outer Perimeter-type bypass freeway between I-15 to I-85 outside of I-285 (something that is a political impossibility now), many of the major surface roads, especially those Outside-the-Perimeter that experience heavy crosstown/cross-metro use partially due to the absence of an outer-suburban/exurban freeway loop remain in need of minor upgrades in the form of widening from four to six lanes, grade separations at major intersections where possible, addition of left-turn and right-turn lanes, etc.

A few examples: 1.) GA 140/Holcomb Bridge Rd between the GA 400 Jct in Roswell and the US 23/GA 13/Buford Hwy intersection in Norcross is in critically need of an upgrade from the current 4-5 lane road to an improved road with a divider that includes six through lanes (three through lanes in each direction) with additional left turn and right-turn lanes at major intersections to match the six-lane divided section since the road carries a very heavy amount of cross-metro traffic between Gwinnett County along the I-85 NE Corridor and Cherokee County in the I-75/575 NW Corridor...2.) US 41/Cobb Parkway from the I-285 Jct out to the Bartow County line is a 4-5 lane road that is divided through part of its length outside of Marietta that handles way more traffic than it is capable of handling due to spillover of traffic off of the miserably peak-hour congested I-75 outside of I-285. US 41 is an undersized major road that is severely in need of an upgrade to at least a divided six lane roadway with continuous right-turn lanes, additional left-turn lanes at major junctions, some of which should be grade-separated. In addition to widening US 41 to accommodate the traffic spillover off of a gridlocked I-75, high-frequency commuter rail service urgently needs to be added on the CSX/W&A freight rail line that parallels US 41 & I-75 and on the GNRR freight line that parallels I-575.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 7:47 pm

@inatl @BillEvelyn

You are very correct that we cannot pave our way out of congestion, but even with the severely pressing need to invest more in mass transit, we still cannot stop investing in the crucial upgrades that our road network remains severely in need of.

Even in transit-heavy cities like Boston, Toronto, Chicago, Washington D.C. and New York, the locals still have to make the necessary investments in the freeway and surface road network.

The problem with the state of Georgia over the last 20 years or so is that we have made virtually no investment in both roads and rails in the heavily-populated and fast-growing Atlanta Region.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 7:55 pm

@inatl @BillEvelyn

We won't be able to stop driving completely as even in transit-heavy cities a lot of peak-hour driving by single-occupant vehicles occurs.

But we can significantly reduce the amount of miles we drive each day as well as substantially reduce our overdependence on single-occupancy vehicles in investing a proper amount (way more than what we currently invests now which earns us a virtually last place in transportation investment) in mass transit, carpooling, vanpooling, etQ

👍 0 🗨️ 0

(<https://saportareport.com/>)

Reply

Report



Bill Evelyn • April 9, 2012 5:51 pm

@The Last Democrat in Georgia They collect enough excise and sales tax from fuel to accomplish what you suggest. The problem is Sonny Purdue, a Democrat registered as Republican ruined GDOT by making political appointments at the top. Decisions were made to reward cronies, not to fix infrastructure.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 8:10 pm

@Bill Evelyn

Very true, Sonny Perdue may very well likely go down as one of this state's worst governors as Perdue helped to likely set this state back 30 years in terms of transportation infrastructure investment.

But I guess that's what happens when fishing ramps and horse barns take priority over economically-crippling traffic jams and severe water shortages.

Though it should be noted that the larger State Legislature certainly played a major role in the decline of GDOT by using the department as a tool for political favors, so many political favors that the agency didn't know how many projects it had on the books or which ones were supposed to be a priority at one point.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 4:19 pm

@Bill Evelyn

"Politicians can't fix traffic problems, they can only confiscate wealth pandering to special interests."

Unfortunately, I wish that you were incorrect with that statement, but one look at our ultra-corrupt State Legislature here in the State of Georgia, a legislature in which there are no limits on the amount of money and "gifts" (a much more encompassing term than you might think) that politicians and government officials can receive from lobbyists representing special interests, proves that you are dead-on with that statement.

Heck, just one look at the embarrassingly, shamefully, wildly inept and almost completely incompetent Georgia Department of Transportation not only proves your assertion that politicians can't fix traffic problems, but can also make traffic problems much, much, MUCH worse by taking a once-proud and critically-lauded road agency and proceeding to purposefully run it completely into the ground.



Report

Report



(https://saportareport.com/)

BillEvelyn • April 9, 2012 5:49 pm

@The Last Democrat in Georgia If politicians could fix traffic problems with legislation that extracts private wealth and transfers it into gub'mint, why is Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Mordor on the Potomac, etc still mired in traffic.

The only metropolis that politicians were able to reduce traffic is Detroit. How's that working for you?



Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 9, 2012 9:34 pm

@BillEvelyn

As major U.S. mega-cities, Boston, NYC, Philly, B-more and D.C. may still have major traffic problems, but at least they have options other than sitting in traffic everyday on the way to-and-from work and other locales (other options like commuter rail, expanded heavy rail, light rail, express buses, carpools, vanpools, etc).

For a supposedly very major international city of six million inhabitants, our commuting options sure do seem to be somewhat limited.

Granted, there has been some effort to expand commuter bus service as well as minimal efforts to expand carpooling and vanpooling options over the last decade or so, but those commuter buses, carpools and vanpools often have to sit in the same gridlocked traffic as everyone else commuting in single-occupant vehicles, especially if the multiple-occupant vehicle is trying to traverse a section of freeway without HOV lanes (I-20 E OTP, I-20 W, I-85 S, I-75 S OTP, GA 400, I-75 N OTP, I-575, I-985, US 78 E, etc) and even sometimes with HOV lanes.



Reply

Report



BillEvelyn • April 10, 2012 3:35 pm

@The Last Democrat in Georgia People don't want to take trains and buses in Atlanta. They can't even get riders on MARTA.



Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • April 10, 2012 9:14 pm

@BillEvelyn

"People don't want to take trains and buses in Atlanta. They can't even get riders on MARTA."

That's not exactly true. While MARTA has had its fair share of ridership issues on some bus routes, overall the system

still averages a pretty healthy 482,000 riders, an average which spiked up well above 500,000 riders/daily in the Summer of 2008 when gas prices spiked through the roof. That year so park & ride lots at MARTA stations often overflowed and parking spaces were hard to come by.



(Note: The 482,500 riders-per-day that use MARTA makes the system the 8th-most utilized rapid transit system in the United States

Meanwhile, GRTA Xpress, the Atlanta Region's express commuter bus system that provides service between the suburbs and the urban core, has been increasingly popular as the service has expanded from only two routes when the service was originally launched in 2004 to nearly 40 routes today (39 routes to be exact).

The Downtown Connector is already almost completely gridlocked during peak hours on weekdays and many weekends with an average of 260,000 vehicles using the hyper-congested roadway on a daily basis. If it wasn't for MARTA and its 482,500 riders taking hundreds-of-thousands of single-occupant vehicles off of the very limited road network of ITP Atlanta, the Downtown Connector and freeway system through Central Atlanta would likely be completely impassable during peak hours.

The increasingly popularity of the GRTA Xpress commuter bus service proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that high-frequency commuter rail service between the exurbs, suburbs and urban core of the Atlanta Region would be more than viable in light of some of the worst twice-daily peak-hour traffic jams and gridlock on the North American continent.

To say that people don't want to take trains and buses in Atlanta and to infer that people in this town would much rather continue to be stuck in some of the worst traffic on the continent without the option to not to have to do so on a daily basis when our peers in every other very major city on the continent and on the planet gladly utilize increased mass transit options and the facts and data clearly state otherwise is extremely shortsighted at best and is total economic suicide at worst, especially when nearly every other major city in North America is either actively expanding access to mass transit or is forging ahead with plans to expand mass transit to compensate for local road networks that for all intents and purposes are virtually completely built-out.

As many of our North American and international peer cities have proven time again and continue to prove, people do want to and WILL ride mass transit if it is clean, dependable, safe, comprehensive and convenient.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



DCJ • April 12, 2012 5:07 pm

Read "Suburban Nation" by Andres Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and I think you will understand the root cause of these problems and how to address them. Needs to be required reading for every developer & planner.

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



SteveBrown • April 30, 2012 11:37 pm

Leinberger is talking out of both sides of his mouth. What this developer forgets to mention is the uncontrolled expansion of the suburbs, particularly Gwinnett County, dropped us deeper in the housing crisis. There is a reason more banks failed in Georgia and it has got nothing to do with mass transit.



Dallas and Houston and peeking off of oil production. Washington DC is peeking off of "no unemployment" in the federal government ranks. However, Dallas, Houston and Charlotte are all beginning to ask serious questions about there transit spending.

Leinberger also forget to mention that while Atlanta's population grew from 2000 on that MARTA ridership declined. Wasn't transit going to solve the problem?

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • May 1, 2012 5:02 am

@SteveBrown

"Leinberger also forget to mention that while Atlanta's population grew from 2000 on that MARTA ridership declined. Wasn't transit going to solve the problem?"

Transit would solve the problem, if it actually went somewhere, as in the places that people need to go.

Of course MARTA's ridership has declined. Despite the Atlanta Region's population increasing by 1.5 million over the last 12 years from 4.1 million in 2000 to 5.8 million present-day, service continues to be cut deep into the bone.

Heavy rail headways that used to be as low as 7 minutes between trains during the Olympic-era are now as high as 15-20 minutes between trains, which is unacceptable for the heavy rail transit service of a major metropolitan area where severe-to-exceptional traffic congestion continues to be a major logistical and quality-of-life problem.

Instead of sitting around and waiting for an incompetent state government, which these days seemingly can't even find their own aes with a spotlight, a magnifying glass, a map and both hands (see GDOT), to raise sales and gas taxes to fund transit expansion (something that remains very improbable despite the coming regional T-SPLOST referendum, MARTA should have and could have likely been making efforts to recover much more of its needed revenues from the farebox.**

👍 0 🗨️ 0

Reply

Report



The Last Democrat in Georgia • May 1, 2012 5:37 am

@SteveBrown

Also keep-in-mind that it often takes more than one type of mass transit to serve very large metro areas like Atlanta.

Many in Metro Atlanta who may not be all-that-familiar with or knowledgeable of mass transit systems in other mass transit systems think that MARTA-style heavy rail is the only type of mass transit that can be expanded to serve suburban and exurban areas, which is not the case.

In most very large metro areas, in addition to heavy rail and local bus service, which serves densely-populated neighborhoods in the urban core of a very large metro area, transit service is often also made up of streetcars, which serve as an attractive substitute for local buses along very high-density, high-population corridors, commuter rail, which operates in the right-of-ways of existing freight rail lines that parallel busy expressways between the less densely-populated and less densely-developed exurbs, suburbs and the more densely-populated urban core, express commuter buses, which provide service between the urban core and suburban and exurban areas often along highly-traveled corridors where commuter rail service is not directly or conveniently available.

In very major metros like Atlanta, a multimodal transportation network doesn't just depend on a woefully-inadequate network of roads and heavy rail, but also incorporates express commuter bus service, regional exurban-to-urban core commuter rail service, light rail and streetcars along with local bus service, heavy rail service and roads.

(A declining) MARTA and an inadequate road network alone cannot solve traffic development or refined a region's mobility.

MARTA heavy rail and local bus service is only compatible with the densely-populated urban core and cannot do much to address the region's transportation issues without the park-and-ride exurban and suburban commuter rail and commuter bus lines to feed riders into them who otherwise are more than likely to drive alone and feed the metro area's severe peak-hour road congestion problems.

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