

TRENDS

Predicting what transportation projects and programs should be implemented over the next 20+ years requires a good understanding of both long-term and recent growth trends. Learn what data was used to develop recommendations.

Regional Growth Trends and Forecasts	22
Regional Assessment Findings	26
Transportation Assessment Findings	34



Regional Growth Trends and Forecasts

During the Great Recession, the Atlanta Region experienced a challenge to the fundamental conditions that had propelled the Region to prosperity and growth over the previous decades. Traditionally, the Atlanta Region has grown and expanded largely on the basis of the long-term trends of:

- National migration trends to the Southeast
- Federal funding programs that supported roadway construction and growth in a decentralized manner
- Access to one of the world's busiest airports
- Inexpensive land values relative to many national peers
- Low cost of living, business costs and wages
- Proximity to major ports, substantial opportunity for higher education, homegrown and new Fortune 500 business headquarters, as well as national facilities such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

These enduring conditions resulted in Atlanta being one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, accommodating large amounts of population and employment growth. This growth brought many benefits to the Region, including an evolution from a regional center to a major international player economically.

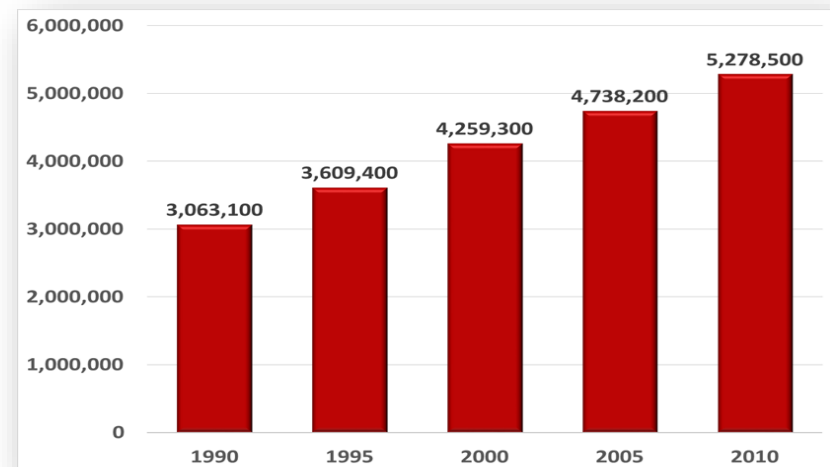
The Region has largely recovered from the lingering effects of the Great Recession over the past few years, with employment levels higher today than before the Great Recession. The real estate market has rebounded, and interest rates remain historically low. While it is still unclear whether a sustained and robust economic recovery will continue, trends in the recovery are encouraging. The overall transportation and land development patterns built to accommodate growth in the latter half of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century are strained and will be challenged to sustain growth going forward.

Trends

As the Southeast's premiere metropolis, the Atlanta Region's growth was a primary driver of the Sunbelt's population explosion in the post-World War II era. Between 1950 and 1970, the Region maintained a robust rate of growth that averaged over 3% annually - more than twice the rate of the Depression years of the 1930s and almost a percentage point higher than during the war years of the 1940s. Apart from brief periods of slower growth during economic downturns in the 1970s and 1980s, the Region maintained the 3% average annual growth rate up until the early 1990s, when the economic recession that hit the nation slowed the Region's growth rate to less than 2% annually.

As the Atlanta Region ramped up efforts in preparation for hosting the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, the Region quickly shook off the effects of the recession, recording its largest single-year population increase

Atlanta Region Historical Population Trends



ever in 1994-1995: 123,477 persons. After the Olympics, the Region experienced a very robust level of growth, adding an average of 100,000 new residents annually during the latter half of the 1990s.

In 2001, the national and regional economies drifted into recession with the Region's annual population growth slowing to only 46,800 in 2003-2004. In the mid-2000s, the Region resumed the robust rates of growth that it experienced in the 1990s, registering an increase of 97,600 persons between 2004 and 2005, followed by an increase of 111,700 in 2005-2006. However, this most recent boom was short lived due to the onset of the recession in late 2007.

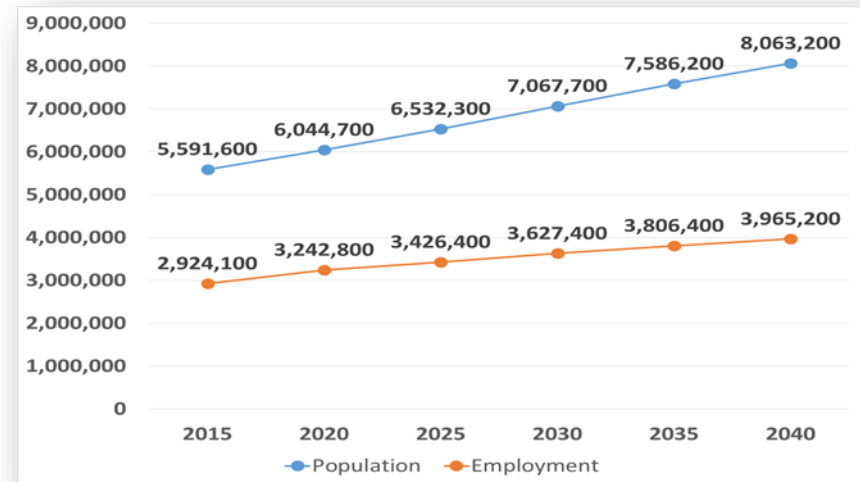
Despite the fact that the first decade of the 21st Century was bookended by two recessions, the Atlanta Region saw the addition of approximately 1 million new residents over the ten-year period – resulting in a total population of 5.26 million residents in the 20 county Region in 2010. This is a healthy annual growth rate of 2.1% from 2000-2010 but represents a slowing from the 3.4% average annual population increase from 1990-2000. Further, from 2010-2015, our population has increased at the even slower average annual rate of 1.2%.

Since 2010, regional policy debate has centered around the adverse impacts of congestion, limited water resources and economic challenges from the Great Recession on growth. While the Region does continue to grow, it does so on a slower average annual rate than in earlier higher growth periods.

Forecasts

Long-range transportation planning is informed by estimates of future population and employment conditions that drive trip-making patterns and travel needs. Regional population and employment forecasts were prepared for this update of *The Atlanta Region's Plan* for the 20 county transportation and air quality planning domain.

Atlanta Region Population and Employment Forecasts



Over a 25-year period from 2015 through 2040, the 20 county Atlanta Region is forecast to add 2.5 million residents, resulting in a total population of more than 8 million. Although such a population increase could be labeled as robust, this is actually a departure from historical trends as the average annual growth rate during this period is forecasted to be a modest 1.5%. The Region maintained annual growth rates of 3% between the 1950s and the 2000s. This forecasted growth rate represents an average annual growth of nearly 99,000 people. Thus, despite the fact that growth rates have slowed compared not only to past trends but also to previous forecast series, this forecast growth is significant enough to place a heavy burden on regional infrastructure, which is already strained by the robust growth experienced over the past 60 years.

Employment for the 20 county Atlanta Region is projected to increase by 1.04 million jobs between 2015 and 2040, for a total job base of almost 4 million. The average annual employment growth rate during this period is forecast at 1.2%.

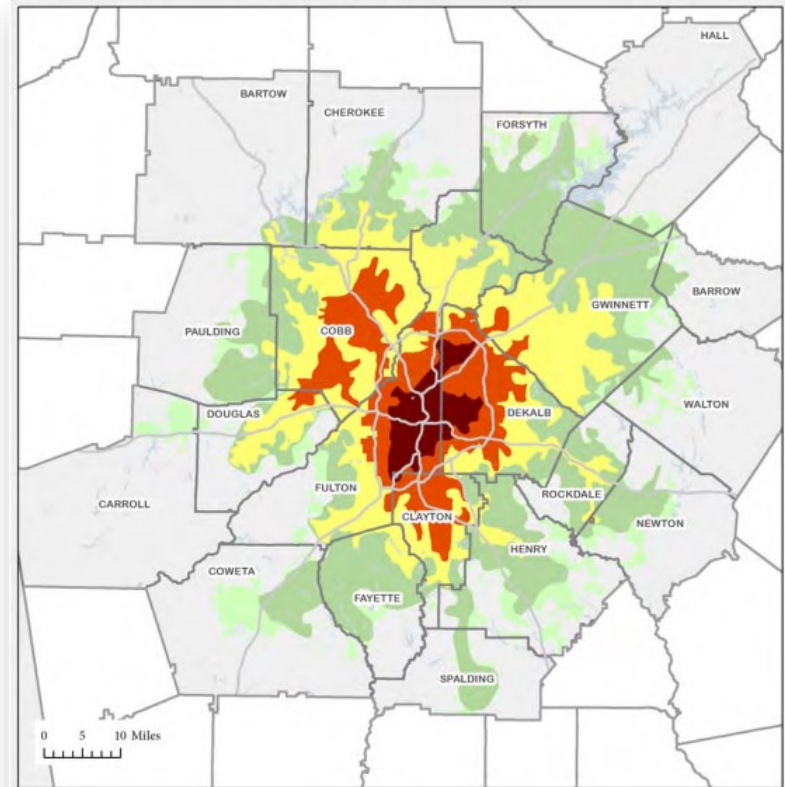
At the county level, growth in the core counties of Gwinnett and Fulton will be the primary driver of the Region’s overall population growth over the next 30 years. Both counties are forecast to add 490,600 and 294,100 new residents, respectively. Combined, this is approximately 32% of the Region’s total population growth in the years 2015-2040.

Two of the fastest growing counties in the nation over the last two decades – Cherokee and Henry – will continue to grow rapidly over the forecast period. Cherokee County will grow by 68% from 2015 to 2040, leading the 10 county Regional Commission (RC) area in percentage increase. It is forecast to add 159,200 people, while Henry will add 133,300, a 61% increase. The City of Atlanta’s recent population surge will also continue.

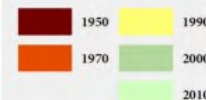
While the 10 county RC area will capture more than 64% of the 20 county area’s growth, larger percentage gains are found in the 10 counties falling outside the RC region. All but one of the counties outside of the ARC RC area are expected to increase by at least 50% in population between 2015-2040. Forsyth County is forecast to have the largest percentage population growth, increasing their population by 108%.

During each plan update cycle, ARC conducts extensive outreach and coordination with local governments to determine these county level estimates, as well as understand more precisely where people within each county are likely to live, work and shop in the future, based on major development announcements, building permits, zoning and other data. This information is then used in regional travel modeling efforts to simulate travel patterns within and between approximately 6,000 traffic analysis zones, essential to identifying and testing potential solutions. Technical aspects of the travel demand modeling process are described in the regional travel demand modeling section of ARC’s website.

Growth of the Atlanta Urbanized Area (1950-2010)



Atlanta Urbanized Area Growth



The Atlanta region’s urbanized area is just over 2,680 square miles, which is the second largest urbanized area in the United States. While this seems large, the region has expanded at its lowest rate since the 1960s. Also areas identified in past regional plans such as the Dog River Watershed and Arabian Mountain have been successfully protected from urban development.

Source: Neighborhood Nexus

Forecasts



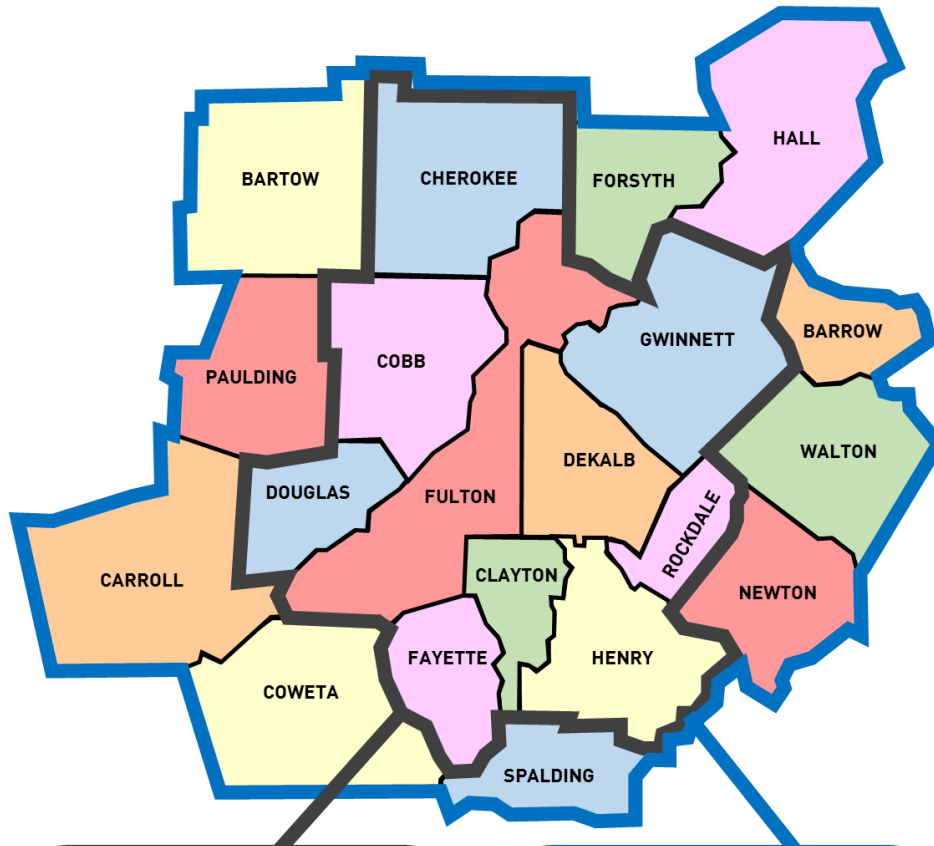
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Modeling Process



LEARN MORE

Forecast 2015-2040 Population Growth by County*



COUNTY	2015	2040	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Cherokee	233,200	392,400	159,200	68.3%
Clayton	266,900	327,600	60,700	22.7%
Cobb	727,500	885,100	157,600	21.7%
DeKalb	718,400	874,400	156,000	21.7%
Douglas	137,300	201,300	64,000	46.6%
Fayette	111,000	143,300	32,300	29.1%
Fulton	970,300	1,264,400	294,100	30.3%
Gwinnett	859,800	1,350,400	490,600	57.1%
Henry	218,400	351,700	133,300	61.0%
Rockdale	89,400	128,100	38,700	43.3%

COUNTY	2015	2040	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Barrow	75,100	135,700	60,600	80.7%
Bartow	110,400	179,100	68,700	62.2%
Carroll	116,200	166,900	50,700	43.6%
Coweta	141,200	239,800	98,600	69.8%
Forsyth	206,700	430,300	223,600	108.2%
Hall	200,600	328,100	127,500	63.6%
Newton	106,500	166,200	59,700	56.1%
Paulding	149,400	259,600	110,200	73.8%
Spalding	66,300	100,100	33,800	51.0%
Walton	87,000	138,700	51,700	59.4%

10 COUNTY REGION TOTALS	
2015 Population	4,332,200
2040 Population	5,918,700
Total Change	1,586,500
Percent Change	36.6%

20 COUNTY REGION TOTALS*	
2015 Population	5,591,600
2040 Population	8,063,200
Total Change	2,471,600
Percent Change	44.2%

* ARC develops forecasts for counties within one more air quality nonattainment areas for modeling purposes. Forecasts are not prepared for the portions of Dawson County and Pike County which are within the MPO area.

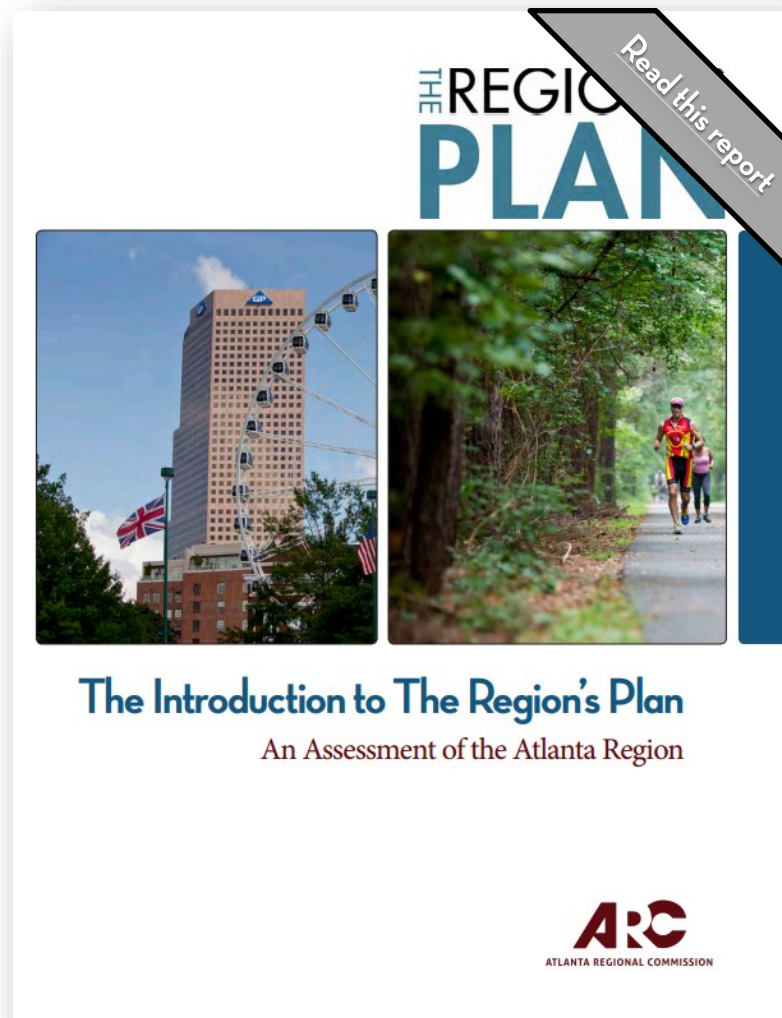
Regional Assessment Findings

The first critical step in the transportation planning process involves identifying investment needs. Needs identification begins with evaluating transportation system performance in the context of regional growth and development trends that drive travel patterns, specifically:

- Population, employment and various socioeconomic characteristics that impact the number and type of trips made within the Region
- Land use and development conditions that shape trip-making patterns and access to key destinations.

Needs analysis occurs for both current-year travel conditions, given existing land use and transportation systems, and projected travel conditions, assuming certain changes in land use, population and employment growth over time.

In March 2014, as part of *The Atlanta Region's Plan* development process, ARC completed a comprehensive Regional Assessment to define the planning context for the Atlanta Region and highlight critical transportation and land use issues that needed to be considered as part of *The Atlanta Region's Plan*. Regional policy makers reviewed and commented on these findings, which were used to shape the plan development process and inform plan recommendations. Findings most directly related to the complex transportation planning opportunities and challenges facing the Region are presented in the following sections. Where appropriate, information from the original assessment has been revised to ensure recommendations of *The Atlanta Region's Plan* and all its component elements reflect current conditions and the best possible forecasts of future conditions.



Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport Is The Region's Greatest Economic Infrastructure Asset

The Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy lists Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport as the Region's greatest strength in terms of competitiveness. No other region in the world can claim the world's busiest airport. The airport serves 250,000 passengers a day to over 225 destinations around the globe, and 80 percent of the US population is within a two hour flight of the Atlanta Region. Passenger volumes continue to grow, leading to the need for improvements to the freeway system and nearby public streets to continue a high level of safety and accessibility.

The airport area is the one of the largest employment centers within the Region and is the largest employment center south of I-20. It has a direct economic impact of \$32.5 billion to the Region's economy and:

- Is the largest employer in the state of Georgia with over 58,000 employees.
- Serves 150 U.S. destinations and more than 75 international destinations in 50 countries.
- Has the tallest air traffic control tower North America (398 feet or 121 meters) and the fourth tallest in the world.
- Averages more than 250,000 passengers a day.
- Averages almost 2,500 arrivals and departures daily.

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport ranks fourteenth in the United States in terms of cargo hauled. This is an area that airport leaders are looking to expand upon, which will have an impact on employment and transportation needs in the southern half of the Region.



Photo credit: Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport

Transportation Options Are Limited For Many Residents

Current premium transit services offer convenient access to less than half of all existing major activity centers in the Region. These premium services are important as they reliably move large amounts of workers and visitors to and from these crucial centers, which harbor the majority of the Region's current employment.

During 2013, these operators moved, on average, over 475,000 people each day throughout the Region, which is about 14 percent less than the average daily ridership estimates for 2009. Much of this decrease is

explained by both service cuts by the major transit providers during the Great Recession and the elimination of transit in Clayton County during that time (now reinstated following a Clayton County vote in November 2014 to join the MARTA system). This shutdown left a large population of transit riders without reliable transportation options. While transit service and ridership has stabilized somewhat in recent years, funding for transit operations remains an issue, as local sources of funding provide most of the operating funds for these services.



Photo credit: MARTA

MARTA Rail Is The Backbone Of Our Regional Transit System

MARTA rail is only located within a two county service area, yet 15 percent of the 10 county Region's jobs are located within a half mile of a MARTA rail station. In 2013, ARC estimated that there is current market demand over 53,000 new residential units within a half mile of existing MARTA stations. The Region is responding to this demand for the first time in 10 years by opening up development opportunities on MARTA station properties, but these projects and stations need infrastructure investments to better connect to the community.

Current rail transit services offer convenient access to less than half of all existing major activity centers in the Region. This rail service is important as it reliably transports workers, residents and visitors to and from these crucial centers, which harbor large concentrations of the Region's current employment. While implementation of existing transit capital projects in the long range element of the RTP, as well as full realization of the Region's long-range vision for transit expansion will connect more new and emerging job centers, its level of success will be dictated by whether people choose to live and work close to transit services.

The growing network of managed lanes on the Region's freeways will also help extend the reach of transit by allowing buses to travel along them, better connecting residents and visitors with the many destinations not currently served by heavy rail transit. As the Region continues to grow and diversify, the need for more transportation options will also increase.



Image credit: MARTA

The Need For Transportation Investments Continues, But There Is Uncertainty In Long-Term Revenue Stability

Over a period of several decades, the Region has experienced a significant decrease in its capacity to implement large-scale projects. The recent economic downturn was prolonged, and transportation funding is not at levels needed to maintain and expand the Region's infrastructure to match growth projections.

Nationally, the funding trends are challenging. The federal funding crisis is based on declining Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and the vehicle fleets' increasing use of alternative fuel vehicles. Both trends have led to decreased funds flowing into the Highway Trust Fund (HTF), the primary source of federal-aid for major transportation projects. The impact is reflected in the HTF's funding deficit, discussed in more detail in the Finances section of this document. The result of these funding shortages is uncertainty in planning for long term and large transportation projects.

At the state and local levels, however, great progress was made in 2015 with passage of the Transportation Funding Act of 2015 (TFA 2015). This state legislation, discussed in the Finances section, will add \$750 million to \$1 billion dollars for transportation needs annually. The bill also allows counties and their municipalities the ability to tax themselves to fund local transportation projects, an option accepted by the voters of Fulton County and the City of Atlanta in November 2016. The bill provides many needed opportunities to bringing the Region's and the State's transportation system up to standard and pave the way to reliable travel.



Opportunities For Success Are Limited For Too Many Residents

The Atlanta Region is perceived nationally as a place of opportunity for diverse populations. Historically, the city fostered many black-owned businesses in the early 20th century, many of which have grown into national enterprises. Part of this growth is due to the Region's relatively affordable housing, attractive quality of life, and breadth of educational opportunity. However, the factors that led to the Region's rise are now shifting, and metro Atlanta is in danger of no longer providing a solid foundation for future growth.

Between 2000-2010, the Region's suburban poor population roughly doubled – from 350,000 to 700,000 individuals. This sharp increase has taken place in communities with limited transit access, schools that are largely unprepared to deal with this shift, and social support networks that are focused on the inner city. Many have slipped into poverty as a result of the Great Recession, and others due to the rising cost of living while wage growth has stagnated. The way our Region addresses these challenges must be coordinated, taking into account the interconnectivity of land use, transportation, education, and economic development.



A Strong Workforce Starts With Access To Quality Education For All

High quality public education is a key building block for a successful regional economy. As our Region rises to the challenge of addressing growing needs and limited resources, we must equip the Region's children with a 21st century education that gives them tools to take part in a competitive regional economy. Several school districts in the Region have in recent years struggled with the threat of having their accreditation pulled, and the statewide controversy around the Common Core standards continues.

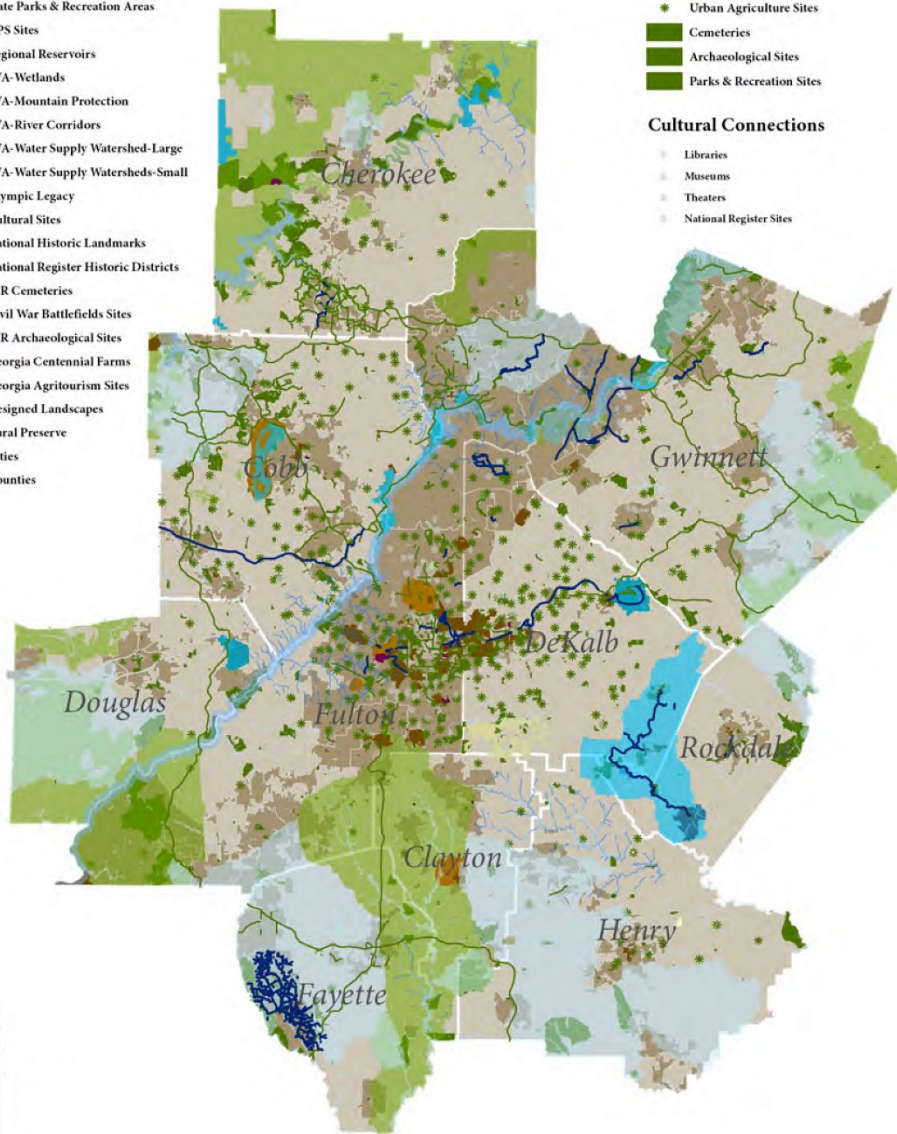
In the 10 county Atlanta Region, 56 percent of all public school students are economically disadvantaged (eligible for free or reduced price lunch), and the average high school graduation rate is 68 percent. Children in districts with a higher percentage of economic disadvantaged students graduate at significantly lower rates than the Region as a whole. This trend is alarming not only because our Region seeks to expand economic opportunity for all residents, but also because businesses are drawn to communities that provide a high-quality education for students in a variety of industry-relevant fields.



Regionally Important Resources

Regionally Important Resources

- Greenways & Trails
- State Parks & Recreation Areas
- NPS Sites
- Regional Reservoirs
- SVA-Wetlands
- SVA-Mountain Protection
- SVA-River Corridors
- SVA-Water Supply Watershed-Large
- SVA-Water Supply Watersheds-Small
- Olympic Legacy
- Cultural Sites
- National Historic Landmarks
- National Register Historic Districts
- RIR Cemeteries
- Civil War Battlefields Sites
- RIR Archaeological Sites
- Georgia Centennial Farms
- Georgia Agritourism Sites
- Designed Landscapes
- Rural Preserve
- Cities
- Counties



Green Infrastructure Network

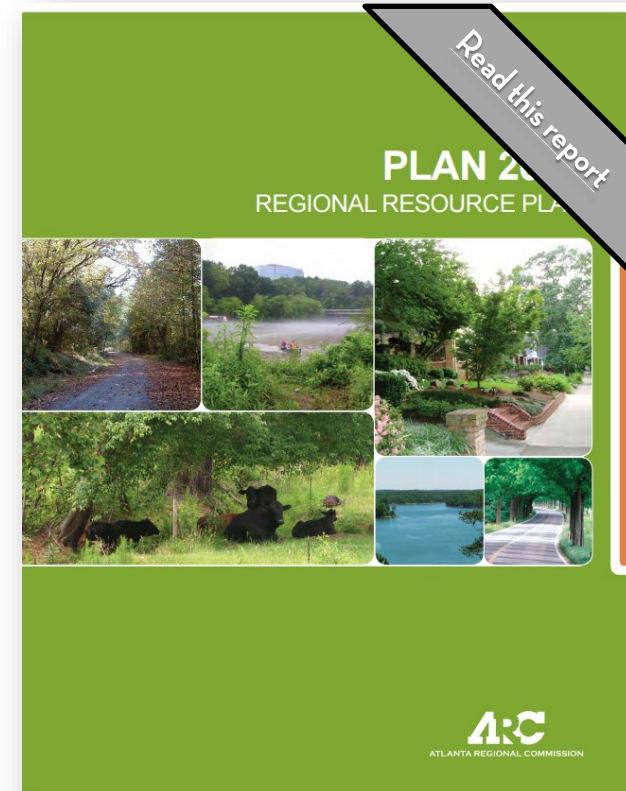
- Bike Facility Network
- ★ Urban Agriculture Sites
- Cemeteries
- Archaeological Sites
- Parks & Recreation Sites

Cultural Connections

- Libraries
- Museums
- Theaters
- National Register Sites



ARC has also developed a *Regional Resource Plan* that identifies critical components of the region's green infrastructure that all parties in the region will need to work to preserve and protect. Initial designation as a Regionally Important Resource does not denote that an area is off limits to future development. What it does suggest however, is that these areas should have an enhanced level of protection and management and that careful consideration should be given to new development. Developing regional priorities for the protection, conservation and/or coordinated management of our region's critical natural and cultural resources is a critical component of *The Atlanta Region's Plan* and influences recommendations of the RTP.

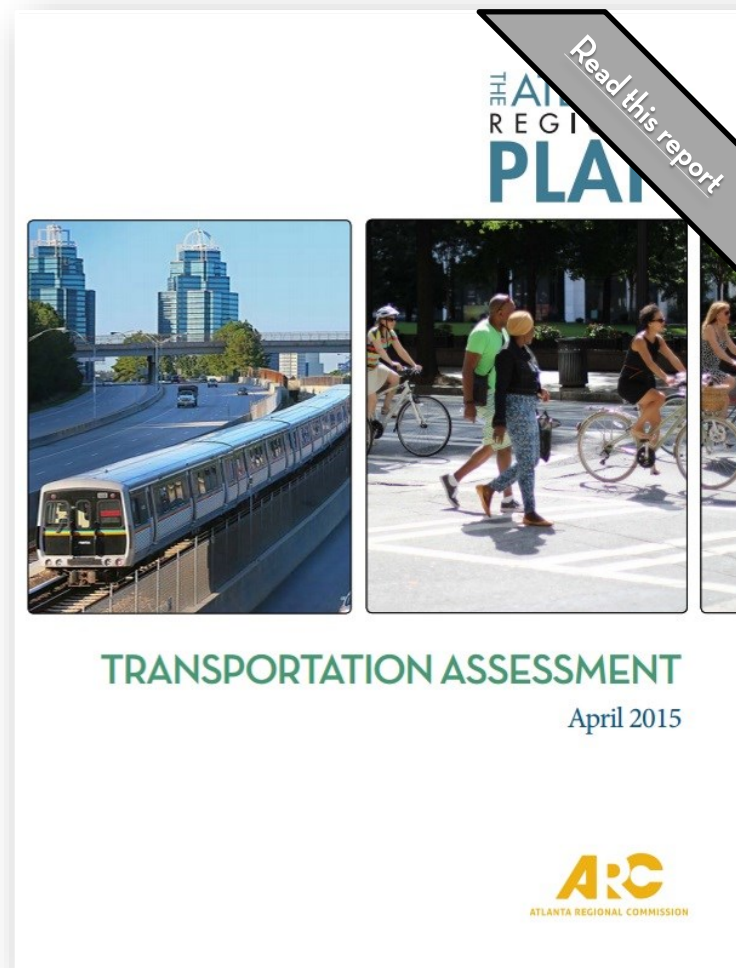


Transportation Assessment Findings

The *Transportation Assessment* identified a number of specific findings and observations about how well the Atlanta Region's transportation system and existing programs meet the definition of "world class", support the Region's economy, and contribute to healthy and livable communities. The document is structured around sections which present data, observations and anecdotal information to explore how well the existing system measures up against the three main outcomes of *The Atlanta Region's Plan* vision.

The assessment found that the Region's transportation system is "world class" in many regards. But like any major metro area, there are shortcomings that must be addressed in order to maintain and build upon the Region's reputation as a great place to live, work, play and do business. Five overarching transportation challenges face the Region: 1) funding, 2) congestion, 3) accessibility, 4) safety and 5) equity. These findings are presented as a series of call to action statements, along with a discussion of why achieving the outcome is vital to the success of the Atlanta Region and all of its communities.

None of these challenges are unique to the Atlanta Region and the terms will resonate with residents of urban areas across the country. But there are circumstances related to each of these challenges distinct from those in other regions and will warrant a continuously focused effort to address. The recommendations of *The Atlanta Region's Plan (Transportation)* are designed to aggressively target these challenges.



1

We must invest more in our transportation system.

World class cities and regions invest in their infrastructure to expand the number of ways for people and goods to move around efficiently and safely. Today's system was designed to accommodate a lower density development pattern, a formula which worked well to grow the Region's economy throughout the latter half of the 20th century. But that formula has become unsustainable and we are now at a pivotal moment in determining how the Region should continue to grow. Many of our suburban roads now serving large subdivisions were once tranquil country byways. These roadways were not designed for the way they are being used today.

For example, too much traffic is being forced along narrow two-lane roads constructed in an era when traffic was light and slower moving. Many regional freeways are overwhelmed by commute traffic and trucks for large parts of the day and expanding capacity would be prohibitively expensive. The footprint of the transit network is too limited to serve the needs of those who cannot drive and those who want to have other options. Sidewalks and biking facilities are disconnected, even in denser parts of the Region where those types of trips are convenient. All of these systems become more expensive to maintain as they age, with the bill now coming due for major rehabilitation projects for the significant amount of infrastructure built in the latter half of the 20th century.

In recent years, calls for being more efficient in how and where financial investments are made in order to "get the biggest bang for our buck" have resulted in a leaner transportation program relying on objective data in the decision making process. But multiple rounds of belt-tightening have not fully solved the problem. To use an analogy, making transportation investment decisions is similar to managing a household

budget. The homeowner can defer or eliminate unnecessary purchases such as a new television or clothes when money is temporarily tight, but if routine household expenses continue to rise and her paycheck remains flat, the problem will continue to become ever more acute. Her ability to pay the mortgage, utility bills and repair bills will become a challenge as well, regardless of how many "nice to have" items she may cut from the household budget.

That's the situation the Atlanta Region finds itself in now: how do we maintain what we already have, while still accommodating continued rapid growth, all on a budget that isn't enough to accomplish either? Innovative finance strategies and public private partnerships are important elements of the solution if we hope to address the myriad of needs.



Photo credit: US News and World Report



Note that the Transportation Assessment was completed in early 2015, prior to passage of the Transportation Funding Act, which significantly increased state funding for transportation. The TFA also provides a mechanism for local governments to increase their investment level through sales tax increases.

2

Congestion threatens the economic competitiveness of the Region, impacting quality of life and our national image.

The Atlanta Region is home to Fortune 500 companies, has a booming filming and tourism industry, is the cradle of the American civil rights movement and has a denser tree canopy than almost any other metro area of its size in the country. Yet, when asked about the Atlanta Region, the first reaction of many people centers around traffic congestion. Even if they have not visited here, they will often offer that they've heard from others who have that traffic is bad.

While it's undeniable that significant portions of the highway and street network do experience significant congestion on a routine basis, our Region's reputation might be somewhat overstated. Even though traffic is heavy at virtually all times, many roadways operate at or near the speed limit throughout most of the day. And even those roadways experiencing peak period congestion frequently have free flow conditions during the midday, evening and weekend periods. It's reasonable to make an argument that congestion would not be a major issue on many roads if it weren't for crashes, stalls and reckless driving.

So where does this reputation for extreme traffic congestion come from? Some of it is warranted because congestion is an indicator of a strong economy, where the pace of growth has exceeded the ability of the transportation system to keep up with demand. This is true of any economically vibrant city around the globe. But some may stem from the level of exposure many commuters have to congested conditions due to long travel distances and a lack of options. Parts of the Region lack a comprehensive network of surface streets that can siphon traffic away and around those hot spots, so the commuter has no choice but to endure that choke point. Even if 20 miles of a 25 mile commute occurred at the speed limit, it's those five miles of stop and go traffic that can

double or triple the overall trip time and color this commuter's perceptions of how bad congestion was along the entire route.

Despite conventional wisdom, we must recognize that congestion is not a problem for most of the network for large portions of the day. Barring the occasional incident, congestion tends to be concentrated along segments of certain corridors at certain times of the day. With limited financial resources, the Region must identify and target the underlying cause of congestion in those areas and be open to a wide array of potential solutions, including additional lanes, operational improvements and other travel options.



Image credit: Atlanta Journal Constitution

3

Accessibility issues require more emphasis if we hope to attract and retain millennials and aging adults.

The Atlanta Region should strive to be the type of place which meets the needs of people of all ages and abilities. Young adults add a dynamic flavor to an area and force us to challenge conventional wisdom by demanding new approaches to old problems. Older adults bring the wisdom of their years to the Region, along with a great deal of free time and disposable income. They can be an enormous asset to the economy, as well as providing checks and balances in discussions about what strategies may be workable and which ones aren't through practical experience.

For young adults, the Atlanta Region offers top-notch higher education opportunities, affordable housing, good career opportunities, and the types of vibrant urban areas which that generation seeks out. For older adults, the Atlanta Region has recreational and volunteer opportunities, excellent medical facilities and a huge diversity of communities which to call home.

A key challenge is that many of the places of importance to these two groups aren't well connected, except by automobile. And these are two groups whose members are interested in options other than the car to get around. The Millennial generation places enormous value on electronic connectivity, with less emphasis on physical mobility. And when they do need to travel, car-sharing services, bicycling, walking and transit are often the preferred methods. Aging Boomers are hesitant to give up their keys, but declining cognitive and motor skills are leaving many with no choice but to find other ways to get around.

Frequently, it's not the "mainline" part of the journey which is most problematic, but rather making the short connections at either end of

the trip. Bus and rail services can carry somebody across a county, but that may be of little help to an individual in a wheelchair if well designed and maintained sidewalks aren't available between the station and the front door of a business. A paved path can make a 10 mile commute viable by bicycle, but a potential rider may be discouraged if there is no way to get the last mile between the path and her office except along a busy high-speed road. These first mile / last mile connections are critical if we want to maximize the potential of these other travel options. While important for all generations, their absence can be a major factor for a young adult or retiree considering whether the Atlanta Region is a good place to call home.



4

The Region must protect and improve the health and safety of all of our residents.

Ensuring that people arrive at their destination safely must be given as much consideration as reducing traffic congestion and motorist travel times. Achieving this requires education, enforcement and behavioral changes, which are not directly under the purview of *The Atlanta Region's Plan* to address. But transportation agencies can help prevent avoidable injuries and deaths through good design and prioritizing funding for a safer transportation system.

A challenge emerging for metro Atlanta is that roads are particularly unsafe for people walking or riding bicycles. Transportation agencies must improve roadway designs to minimize routine traffic risks and make walking and bicycling safe and convenient options. Infrastructure design is critical, especially for elements that reduce traffic speeds, improve crossings along busy corridors, and protect vulnerable road users. ARC can advance a safety vision for the region and prioritize projects that include proven safety countermeasures. Outside ARC's purview – but important for local results – are enforcement actions that increase automatic recording and normalize enforcement action, and marketing or outreach strategies that focus on reducing driver inattention and improve user behaviors. Careful attention to the design of our roadway system can help reduce the danger faced by all travelers and discourage risky behaviors.

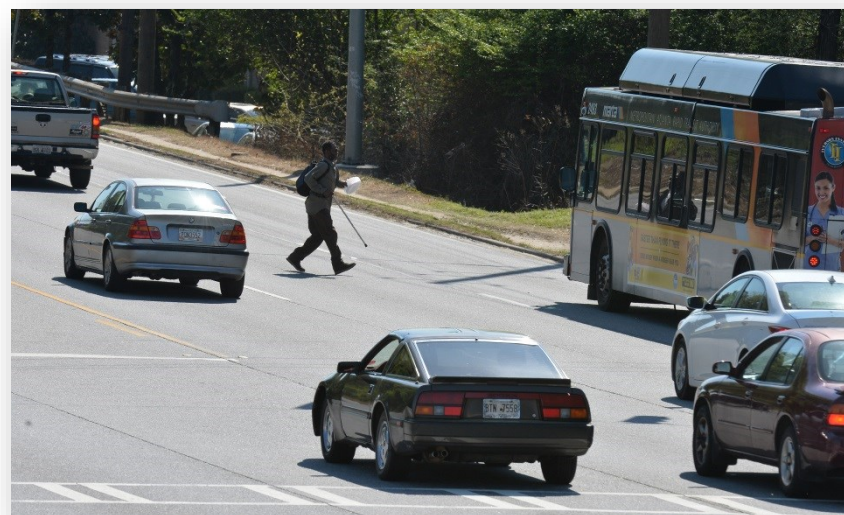


Photo credit: Atlanta Journal Constitution

5

Cultivating prosperity in all communities must be a key consideration in designing and prioritizing transportation strategies.

In some cases, growth can appear as if it happens almost overnight, as evidenced by the phenomenal amount of growth along Atlanta's Eastside Trail over the past few years. In other cases, the payoff may not occur for years, or even decades. Developers and local governments are doing a more effective job directing growth along the MARTA rail network, as demonstrated by recent announcements by State Farm and NCR to build new headquarter campuses with direct access to the system.

The center of gravity for development in the Region is still north of the geographic center, but there are signs that the pendulum is beginning to shift. Much work remains to be done, however, to give all parts of the Region an equal opportunity to share in the benefits of growth. Congestion in western, southern and eastern areas may not be as widespread or severe as in the northern swath of the Region, but there are still locations which are severely strained by traffic.

But just because congestion may not be as significant an issue in these areas compared to elsewhere in the Region, that doesn't mean there aren't transportation needs. Throughout the Region, there are signs of disinvestment in the existing transportation system that can discourage developers from giving some areas due consideration. Poor pavement condition, malfunctioning traffic signals, lack of transit options for low income and disabled residents, badly maintained rights-of-way and sidewalks, and clogged storm drains are often more urgent challenges in these areas than congestion.

Some parts of the Region are able to compensate for a lack of state and federal funding through a combination of local option sales taxes or funds generated through community improvement districts. But in areas

without these mechanisms, even minor maintenance projects are difficult to afford. And when these issues go unaddressed, it can create a downward economic spiral as potential new businesses and residents are turned away due to the atmosphere of neglect and decay the lack of routine maintenance creates. The entire Region must work together to find a way to stop this cycle. The economic development potential of a road surfacing project in a distressed area could be just as significant as a new interchange or roadway might be to a more affluent community. While the immediate impact may not be as large, such a project could be an inexpensive way to inject a spark of life into parts of the Region which have fallen further and further behind over the years.



Photo credit: Creative Loafing Atlanta