

A discussion group was held at ARC on October 21, 2009 as a part of ongoing targeted conversations for PLAN 2040. The purpose of this discussion was to gain the perspectives of a diverse group* of participants with experience in social equity impacts on individuals living in the Atlanta region and representing advocacy, service and educational organizations across the region. Below are the notes taken from these conversations. The questions asked were:

- If you could change one thing about the metro Atlanta region, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing in your community, what would it be?
- What should be preserved or protected in metro Atlanta or your community?
- What are the MOST important things for metro Atlanta to focus on to continue to be a sustainable and economically successful region in the future?
- What should guiding principles be to integrate social equity into ARC's regional planning process?

Question: If you could change one thing about the Metro Atlanta region, what would it be?

- Traffic (many voices expressed this view)
- Lack of public transportation
- Improve crime and safety issues
- More affordable housing in the City with a more balanced distribution
- Adequate infrastructure – economic development follows available infrastructure
- Better planned mass transit
- Create a freedom plan for human rights
- More ADA accessibility overall for housing and transportation options
- Balance of housing where jobs are located
- Better affordability for seniors in the City
- Better sidewalks and walkability in the City
- More highways for outer areas of Metro Atlanta so that there are more alternative routes.
- Public services should be compliant with civil rights
- More funding for aging services
- Education for K-12 and adults

Question: If you could change one thing in your community, what would it be?

- Have a grocery store with fresh foods that are made or originate from local area
- More trees
- Change people's view of "social equity" and believe it is important
- More organization support from top down government about urban gardening
- Air pollution
- Need a better system for preventing trash in the community. Need better code enforcement. Vacant homes and lots bring down the community

- Integrated system with crime, safety, police – better systems for communicating across emergency services
- More inclusiveness for migrant population
- Homelessness
- Eliminate English-only laws
- Refuges are a key part of the global economy and there seems to be a disconnect here for them – need better immigrant support
- Better training for government elected officials to understand immigrants

- Make things more accessible for strollers and for seniors – everyone should be able to access places
- Jobs for people that live within their community because people have to drive pretty far for jobs
- Empathy training to help us understand each other better
- Educate community leaders
- Paradigm must shift on social equity
- More and better public transportation
- Need to see transportation differently and not only see MARTA as an option to take to the airport but instead should because to use it all over Metro Atlanta region, in particularly Gwinnett and North Fulton County
- More local transit – even private transit companies are succeeding in the Buford Highway corridor – this means there is more demand for services

Question: What should be preserved or protected in Metro Atlanta or your community?

- Our colleges and universities – they should be used as to strengthen our economic and socio-economic assets
- Trees and parks
- Quiet neighborhoods
- Historical significance i.e. Morehouse College area
- Public hospitals, such as Grady
- MARTA- we need to preserve and expand
- Cultural amenities – theater, music, art, festivals
- Pre-K, early childhood education programs
- Ethnic diversity as well as welcoming gay/lesbian communities
- Senior population – more context sensitivity - help sustainable neighborhoods
- Protect intown affordable housing
- Historic preservation (think Savannah)
- Cordiality and friendliness of people here
- Continue to build up downtown as central area/hub for Atlantans and tourists
- Educate K-12 about Atlanta and our region since they are our future
- Philanthropic organizations that give and help support organizations

- Encourage development around Hartsfield-Jackson Airport as it is very underdeveloped for the area that it serves
 - Creativity, design, innovation in our area
 - Need better marketing to attract new industries such as music and film industries
 - We need more recycling programs. Decatur has a great one, but Cobb County and Marietta are not so great.
 - More bike paths and increased bike safety
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- Water/air quality
 - Scenic beauty and nature
 - Build on civil rights movement – how should we focus on this in the future?

Question: What are the MOST important things for Metro Atlanta to focus on to continue to be a sustainable and economically successful region in the future?

- Shouldn't need to have a car to get around. Need more land use and transit planning
- More live/work communities
- Better educated workforce
- Better human relations so we get along better
- Culturally and linguistically competent services
- Conserve natural resources such as Lake Lanier
- Create alternative uses for Lake Lanier
- Would like to see communities work together instead of working in "silos". Transit funding would go further if counties worked together to cross county lines. (i.e. 70% of Cherokee residents leave the county for employment)
- Stop thinking about self and "my county" – we need to think regionally
- Affordability – we need a more realistic assessment about our revenue base.
- Connect better with the rest of Georgia
- Balance growth and economic development
- Physical infrastructure that is strategic about civic involvement
- Develop future leaders
- Decision makers should ask "who benefits?", not just them

Question: What should guiding principles be to integrate social equity into our regional planning process?

- Collaborative problem solving that brings all stakeholders to the table
- Go out into community where people are for participation
- We shouldn't just think about social equity by census blocks – it needs to be more overarching than that – the block group is not just a "community"

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- Develop more measures for multimodal transportation – not just highways (LOS, more multimodal measures)
 - Inclusion of all communities because each community has a unique need that needs to be expressed
 - Need to include the hearing impaired and use sign language communication
 - Minorities aren't just ethnic minorities, but includes the gay/lesbian/transgender population as well
 - Those who work during the day or travel far for business should be included in the planning process as well (i.e. those who may not be able to attend meeting)

*In attendance at this discussion group were representatives from:

Minority Professional Network, MARTA, Mexican American Business Chamber, Refugee Women's Network, Atlanta Transit Riders Union, Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership, Environmental Protection Agency, Georgia Division of Aging Services, Clayton County Resource Center, Latin American Association, Center for Pan-Asian Community Services, Community Services Agency of Cherokee County, Center for Community Change, Refugee Family Services, Mexican Consulate, Emory University Office of Community Partnerships, 100 Black Men of Atlanta, Bonner Office of Community Service Morehouse College.