

Two discussion group sessions were held on October 13, 2009 at the ARC Office which included college students from universities located across Metro Atlanta\*. The purpose of the sessions was to obtain opinions from this group on the Plan 2040 process and on what aspects of the region should be focused on during the plan development process. The group was given an overview of the demographic changes that are expected in the region through 2040. The group then was asked a series of questions pertaining to the future of Metro Atlanta. Each group's responses are summarized.

#### **Summary of First Session – 3:00 – 4:30 PM**

#### **Question: How can the Metro Atlanta region stay diverse and competitive through jobs, education, and economic development opportunities?**

- Students come to Atlanta to go to school and then stay
  - o Reach out to help out-of-state students stay
  - o Create more out-of-state student scholarships
- Higher education
- Help constituents that already live here (K-12); help them have the chance to go to college in the region; better educate constituents in region
- Take care of education issues here such as crime and racial tensions
- Make it possible to live in-town without a car
- Have affordable housing for all economic classes, which also encourages employers to locate here
- Address safety (crime, better lit streets, deserted streets, need to fill-in the streets to make them safer)
- Encourage mixed land use development (skyscraper with retail on bottom floor)
- Encourage livable communities like Atlantic Station
- To stay competitive, must do something about traffic

#### **Question: How can we further protect the environment in Metro Atlanta, thinking about climate change, green space, and impacts on our health?**

- Reduce car usage and dependence – encourage biking, livable centers, etc .
- Improve runoff and stormwater
- Encourage green roofs
- More porous cement – pervious pavements, etc.
- Some people don't care, some people do care
- Vacant lands – use infill land instead of developing already vacant land
- Make biking more accessible and easier
- Bring things closer to each other as seen in Town Brookhaven and Atlantic Station
- There is disagreement in suburban settings about what to do
- Freeze growth in Hall County

- Lawrenceville used to have lots of trees - now look at what it has become because of lack of control on growth

**Question: What does the phrase “safe, affordable, and efficient transportation” mean to you? How can we improve our existing transportation system?**

- Transportation needs to be easily accessible
- Goes to different regions
- People who can't afford cars should be able to get around
- Would like a carless lifestyle
- If you live in Chamblee, you have to drive everywhere and can't use MARTA because it doesn't connect to places and isn't accessible without getting to it with a car
- MARTA doesn't cover enough territory and doesn't have enough connectivity
- MARTA – nice start – we need keep working on the ultimate system
- Need light rail throughout the metro area
- Need other options besides cars - sick of sitting in traffic
- MARTA is geared to just one demographic - MARTA should be geared to more demographics
- Some people feel “live and let live” about the transportation system - what are you going to do?
- Regional system needs to take control - need more coordination with the multiple systems
- 16-lane highways won't work, especially for the future
- Should be more thoughtful about development of use
- Shouldn't MARTA be faster than it would be to drive? It takes over an hour to take MARTA from Chamblee to airport vs. 30 minutes to drive to the airport from Chamblee
- Does Atlanta look at other cities like New York for ideas?
- Have they thought about controlling growth around Atlanta so it doesn't keep expanding?
- Demographic shift- what is ridership going to look like in the future? Second and third generation users are going to stop riding MARTA

**Question: What does the term “efficient transportation” mean to you?**

- Moving as many people as possible
- Least amount of fuel
- Cost effective to people

**Summary of Second Session (5:00 – 6:30 PM)**

**Question: How can the Metro Atlanta region stay diverse and competitive through jobs, education, and economic development opportunities?**

- Cut corporate taxes
- Start strong bilingual program for students - English speakers should learn Spanish and Spanish speakers should learn English
- K-12 – improve the quality of education for in-town schools
- Create more attractive, sustainable communities like Atlantic Station, with more economic activity.
- Have everything in one central place to encourage walking
- More efficient resource spending
- Encourage brownfield redevelopment
- Affordable housing
- Sustainability is a big thing – we should find better ways than relying on fossil fuels
- Atlanta should be a leader and more forward thinking to show that our economy can benefit from sustainability
- MARTA- not usable, not effective, we need to change its perception - ARC should engage in campaign to change perception of MARTA
- Need for more progress in transit
- Beltline is very important to community
- Biggest problem with MARTA is that it is not getting people where they need to go. Effective transportation should reach the areas of the region on the periphery of the city.
- Neighborhood commercial districts need to be preserved to protect the unique characteristics of the neighborhood.
- There are issues with big box developments, especially when they leave their location after 15 years and the community is left with a blighted and unusable space. You can't readily repurpose a big box store.
- Invest in arts as an economic tool

**Question: What are the needs of individuals and families in the Metro Atlanta region, for all incomes, age groups, and ethnicities?**

- Homelessness needs to be addressed with an effective program
- Blight – signs should be more attractive to the eye
- Aging population will become more dependent on transit, could become isolated – we need elderly shuttles
- More diverse collection of shuttles- create shuttles to take you to MARTA
- Talk to people in community
- Add Mandarin Chinese language education - will attract more international business
- How will Atlanta as a logistics hub be affected by regional growth?
- We should encourage a stronger organic food movement in Atlanta – we have so much open space in the Metro Atlanta. We need a stronger social capital-place connection, e.g. City of Decatur
- Promote more international culture – we only have the Buford Highway area
- We could rebuild the area around Clark Atlanta University Center -get more merchants to invest there because the students will spend their money there if it's improved

**Question: What does the phrase “safe, affordable, and efficient transportation” mean to you? How can we improve our existing transportation system?**

- Cleanliness of MARTA is often associated with safety as well
- Need light rail in dense neighborhoods in the city - more density and transportation options without the use of cars
- Frequent, reliable transit with time schedules that run about every 5-10 minutes
- We must convince the public to support MARTA
- Efficient = less congestion
- Use congestion pricing
- Land use patterns and densities can make transit more affordable to the cities and region if the high densities and uses are served by transit systems
- Reliable time schedules
- Information on schedules readily available e.g. have schedule sent to blackberry and on signs outside train stations (“10 minutes until arrival, etc.)
- Funding – there is a problem with the way the state does funding, especially since so much is used for roads instead of transit
- Metro Atlanta should be player in national rail planning

\*Students came from Emory, Georgia State, Georgia Tech, Kennesaw, Morehouse, and Oglethorpe universities.