

## Plan 2040 Neighborhood Forum Cobb, Cherokee, Douglas and Paulding Counties

On June 10, 2010, The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened the first of four Neighborhood Forums on the Atlanta Regional Commission's Plan 2040, a comprehensive 30-year plan currently under development to accommodate the region's population and economic growth sustainably. Targeted toward residents of Cobb, Cherokee, Douglas and Paulding Counties, this forum was held to solicit public input on the early stages of the planning process, including its vision, goals and objectives, and focus areas. Thirty people participated in the forum, working in five groups of six for about two hours. ARC staff members were on hand to provide information and respond to participants' questions.

Participants recorded their reactions and ideas related to the evening's discussion on flip charts. Their comments were later transcribed by Civic League staff and are included in this report under the heading "Small Group Results". Participants' comments were wide-ranging and should be read in their entirety, but several observations are worth noting:

- Participants came for a variety of reasons. Some for general reasons, such as curiosity, a desire to learn about the issues and a sense that their participation was important. Others came because of their interest in a particular regional issue, such as housing for seniors, water supply, local food production, transportation for special populations like seniors and young people and transportation in general.
- Their initial reactions to the presentation on Plan 2040 were somewhat skeptical, though not because of the plan itself but rather because of a lack of confidence in elected officials and, more generally, in the way things get done (or don't get done) in the region. There were several calls for streamlining or consolidating agencies and services for the sake of efficiency, with one group calling for "no county lines!" Water and transportation were repeatedly mentioned as areas of deep concern.
- When groups were asked to identify their top three of Plan 2040's nine focus areas, there was considerable consensus around *1. Promote sustainable and energy-efficient land development and transportation investments; 4. Through regional infrastructure planning, limit growth in undeveloped areas of the region; and 8. Conserve and protect environmentally-sensitive areas and increase the amount and connectivity of greenspace.* Two focus areas received no votes: *6. At strategic regional locations, plan and retain industrial and freight land uses; and 9. Promote alternatives and efficiencies of the existing transportation system before adding capacity.*
- The groups suggested 26 ideas for actions they thought should be taken to drive their respective priority focus areas. Those ideas varied widely, though again there were suggestions pertaining

to consolidating agencies. There were also mentions of various “carrots and sticks”, including incentives, tax increases and tax credits, zoning changes, etc.

### **Meeting Process**

Participants were welcomed by Mike Worley, a member of The Civic League board of directors. Mike introduced Civic League staff members Ellen Mayer and Tamara Pursley; ARC staff members Judy Dovers, Jane Hayse and John Orr; and facilitator Mattice Haynes. Mattice welcomed participants, gave them a brief overview of the night's agenda and directed their attention to a quick "getting connected" exercise in which group members introduced themselves, stated which county they lived in and explained their motivations for attending the forum.

Mattice then turned the podium over to Jane Hayse, transportation planner, who gave forum participants an overview of Plan 2040, including current needs in metro Atlanta; a vision, goals and objectives; and reactions to the plan thusfar (Appendix A).

At the conclusion of Jane's presentation, Mattice gave the groups 20 minutes to respond, asking them to record on their flip charts the answers to three questions: *What did we hear? What are our reactions?* and *What questions do we want to ask?*

Following this discussion, Jane made a second presentation outlining nine potential directions and focus areas for Plan 2040 (Appendix B). Mattice then asked groups to work through three sets of questions:

- Which three of these focus areas do you think are most important to really drive progress in the region over the next 30 years towards the vision, goals and objectives and WHY? Are there any focus areas missing? If so, what's missing?
- What actions should be taken to drive progress in each of your top three focus areas?
- What will be different in our region if Plan 2040 is successful and how will we know?

The groups had about 20 minutes to address each question, and Mattice asked a spokesperson from each group to report out key points before moving on to the next question.

At the end of the evening, Judy Dovers from ARC thanked participants for their input and invited them to continue their involvement in the development of Plan 2040 by participating in ARC's online public meetings.

### **Small Group Results**

For the first small group exercise, participants were asked to state their motivations for attending the Neighborhood Forum.

#### **Group 1**

- plan the region
- participate in the process
- learn how participants are recruited
- curiosity
- to have a voice
- learning about issues in the region

## Group 2

- personal & business
- family & business
- seniors housing
- participate in improvements
- sustainable & smart growth
- transportation for seniors
- stay informed about what's going on

## Group 3

- better/more functional areas for young people with alternate forms of transportation
- sustainable water supply
- be more informed about others' ideas
- increase capacity of neighborhoods to participate in the process
- planning for local areas to produce our food supply

## Group 4

- transportation progress
- water
- longtime active communities
- health of the region
- listen

## Group 5

- want to see good planning
- working on merit badges (to eventually be Eagle scouts)
- curiosity
- see how it happens/how it ends/how it can help our community
- to learn

Following the introductory presentation on Plan 2040, forum participants were asked to discuss and document their reactions to what they had heard and note any questions they had.

## Group 1

### Reactions

- hope that the issues will be resolved
- impatient; need to see progress
- pessimistic; not enough grassroots participation
- pessimistic; how do we make it a grassroots effort

#### Questions

- If 3-5 million new residents are anticipated, where will they live/where will they work?
- how do we get the policymakers here?
- how do we get those who "haven't drunk the kool-aid" here?

#### Group 2

##### Reactions

- talk is cheap - action is needed
- implementation/politics (political reality is self-serving)
- actionable implementation plan with conceptual framework
- power/authority of The Civic League
- sustainable development regulations to save water
- need authority
- infighting between agencies

##### Questions

- why can't we have one transit agency??
- can some ideas be better defined?
- is there a problem with one regional dept of transportation? Water? Land use?
- does expand further mean geographic and/or economic?
- what is the basis behind "we do not have the financial capacity to expand further if we expect to meet our needs"?

#### Group 3

##### Reactions

- real estate - low density is difficult to maintain
- low water supply
- concerns of major business areas
- transportation
- growth projections if positive changes are not made

##### Questions

- how realistic are the growth projections for the long term considering much of the growth was based on the real estate bubble?
- why does ARC/GRTA continue to approve DRI's that are in direct conflict with their own policies on land use?
- when is Atlanta region/state going to seriously undertake preservation and protection of our water supplies?
- how do we maintain or preserve existing farms? (working farms, not just small green spaces)
- is a plan in place to merge transit systems under one "company"?

#### Group 4

##### Reactions

- water!
- lots of needs - need plan for funding
- need leadership - no county lines!
- education is lacking in Georgia
- social integration

##### Questions

- how can ARC help with education?
- how can we use parking charges?
- how can ARC help with water?

#### Group 5

##### Reactions

- average mileage of 28 per person per day - the amount of resources that requires!
- improving transportation affects air quality, family time, cost of living, gas usage
- everything is intertwined

##### Questions

- can some ideas be better defined?

Participants then heard a second presentation, this time outlining nine potential focus areas for Plan 2040 as well as a proposed vision, goals and objectives. Following the second presentation, the discussion groups were asked to identify three focus areas they thought were most important to drive progress in the region over the next 30 years toward the vision, goals and objectives and why. Mattice also asked them to note any focus areas that should have been included in the list but were not.

#### Group 1

- #1 - promote sustainable and energy-efficient development and transportation investments
- #5 - encourage a variety of choices related to housing and transportation for all income groups and ages
- #8 - conserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas and increase the amount and connectivity of greenspace
- Suggestion – #5 restate " . . . all segments of the region"

#### Group 2

- #1 - promote sustainable and energy-efficient development and transportation investments
- #4 - through regional infrastructure planning, limit growth in undeveloped areas of the region
- #8 - conserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas and increase the amount and connectivity of greenspace
- Missing – promote telecommuting

### Group 3

- #8 - conserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas and increase the amount and connectivity of greenspace
- #4 - through regional infrastructure planning, limit growth in undeveloped areas of the region
- #2 - assure the preservation, maintenance and operations of the existing transportation system
- Missing – neighborhood government structure (neighborhood councils or NPU's expanded throughout metro region)

### Group 4

- #1 - promote sustainable and energy-efficient development and transportation investments
- #3 - focus resources and public investments in existing communities
- #7 - advance density (more units per acre) and a mix of uses of land at planned transit station locations

### Group 5

- #4 - through regional infrastructure planning, limit growth in undeveloped areas of the region
- #8 - conserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas and increase the amount and connectivity of greenspace
- #1 - promote sustainable and energy-efficient development and transportation investments

Small groups then listed actions they thought should be taken to drive progress in each of their top three focus areas.

### Group 1

- public opinion campaign to support #1
- tax increase to fund #1
- better/stronger land use control/coordination to support #8
- one transit agency
- increase bus/rail service (combined)
- incentives for affordable home ownership
- alternatives to zoning practice that segregates uses

### Group 2

- #1 - tax credits, developer incentives, encourage LEED
- #4 - transfer of development rights, strong zoning plans, preservation of greenspace
- #8 - general conservation of greenspace, comprehensive greenspace plan

### Group 3

- state legislature freed up money allocated to MARTA so they could spend it; funds allocated for regional transportation cannot be spent any other way

- enforce and uphold all environmental protection laws/ordinances such that they are not subject to being ignored by politicians/special interests
- legislate significant fines for violation

#### Group 4

- coordinate density with transit
- regional SLOST in 2012
- plan projects in developed population centers
- preserve energy by removing cars from road (incentives to use alternative fuels or transit)
- increase parking fees -- use funds for transit
- use technology to improve transit
- implement energy efficiency into development codes (LEED)
- incentives for developers to build livable communities near transit centers
- tax developments not connected to transit centers
- toll roads

#### Group 5

- limit transportation expansion in selected areas
- charge tolls on roads (to discourage driving, encourage carpooling, raise revenue, reduce pollution & traffic)
- controlled and well-planned zoning

Finally, Mattice asked small groups to consider how Plan 2040's success might be measured. What would be different in our region if Plan 2040 is successful and how will we know?

#### Group 1

- regional transportation (combined/expanded)
- regional community
- better air quality & shorter commutes
- more public green space
- 60% of people will be driving to work as opposed to today's 75%
- foreclosure rates will go down
- fewer obese children
- strong grassroots organizations everywhere/willing participants
- culture change

#### Group 2

- when we can see Stone Mt. from Galleria/I-75 in July!
- when I can take a train from Marietta Square to Athens
- better water quality/no restrictions

- when Atlanta becomes the example in lieu of Portland
- 20% of commuters in metro area ride bikes
- everyone has a park/greenspace/trail within half-mile walk
- 20% of our metro power comes from renewable sources (sun, wind, etc.)
- when we all ride a train at least once a month

Group 3

- more parts of Atlanta region will look more like Portland, OR
- Atlanta beltline will be a success
- people will have greenways
- people will be able to travel anywhere they choose without a car
- we will have clean water and plenty of it

Group 4

- traffic congestion less than in 2010
- reduction of transportation funding gap
- double (or better) transit miles
- improved process to qualify for federal dollars
- improved air quality (comply with federal standards)
- adequate water sources to meet region's needs
- top 10 in education in the country
- more greenspace

Group 5

- how stable is the economy? (more jobs? Increased per capita income?)
- has technology improved?
- what is the crime rate?
- has pollution gone up or down?
- are there population changes? (move away from bad places/to good places)

**Snapshot of Participants**

The Civic League collected demographic surveys of the participants in this forum. Here are the results:

<b>Demographic Snapshot (24/30 forms turned in)</b>	
male	13 (54%)
female	11 (46%)
under 18	3 (13%)
18 to 24	0
25 to 39	3 (13%)



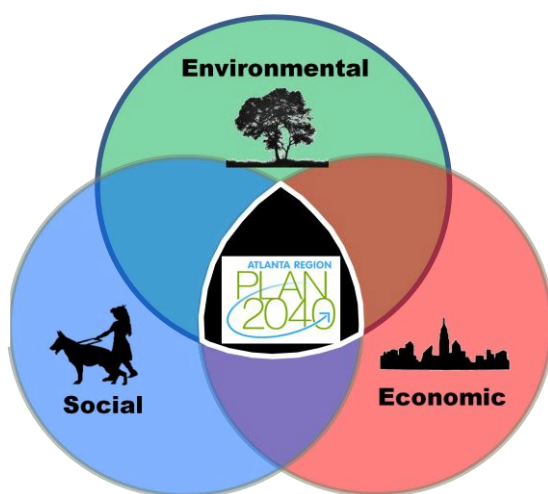
40 to 54	9 (38%)
55 to 65	6 (25%)
over 65	3 (13%)
African-American or black	3 (13%)
Caucasian or white	20 (83%)
Asian or Pacific Islander	1 (4%)
Hispanic	0



## *Metro Atlanta's future: How do we make it what we want?*

### **What is PLAN 2040?**

Metro Atlanta's plan to accommodate economic and population growth over the next 30 years. The Plan is organized around a foundation of sustainability.



### **What are some key current needs in metro Atlanta?<sup>1</sup>**

- ✓ We are well positioned for an economic recovery, but we must begin adjusting how we live and do business.
- ✓ Our long-term economic success rests on having an adequate water supply.
- ✓ Significant transportation investments are required along with increased housing in major employment centers.
- ✓ We do not have the financial capacity to expand further if we expect to meet our needs.
- ✓ Our future population will be very different than it is today, being both older and more racially diverse.
- ✓ Housing demand will shift toward communities that offer amenities close to employment and cultural opportunities.
- ✓ Approximately 75% of us have no other option but to drive to where we want to go.
- ✓ Beyond the need for increased transportation funding, existing assets must be better managed.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information on regional needs is available on-line at <http://www.atlantaregional.com/transportation/plan-2040>.

- ✓ We must focus our planning on both existing urbanized communities and those areas reserved for conservation.

## **How could we address these needs?**

### Vision

Provide aggressive leadership for sustainable growth and balance environmental responsibility, economic growth and social needs while maximizing benefits to all.

Goals: What do we want metro Atlanta to be and do for its residents, businesses, and visitors?

- Lead as the global gateway to the South
- Encourage healthy communities
- Expand access to community resources.

Objectives: How will we go about achieving our vision for metro Atlanta? Increase mobility options for people and goods

- Foster a healthy, educated, well-trained, safe and secure population
- Promote residential choices in locations that are accessible to jobs and services.
- Improve energy and resource efficiency while preserving the region's environment and critical assets.
- Identify innovative approaches to economic recovery and long term prosperity.

## **How are metro area leaders and residents reacting to this information?<sup>2</sup>**

- ✓ Focus on doing better with what we have, including finding more efficiencies in existing systems and resources.
- ✓ Connect housing, jobs, and transportation assets.
- ✓ Emphasize the interconnectivity between transportation options, land infrastructure, health consequences, energy efficiencies, and water supply.
- ✓ Provide more than one choice for travel.
- ✓ Provide incentives to implement public policy decisions.
- ✓ Provide transit options in many forms, including support for a regional transit system.
- ✓ How do we focus investments on already developed areas versus outlying areas?
- ✓ Density in land developments only works in certain areas.
- ✓ Safety is a primary concern from both a travel perspective and in our neighborhoods.

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<sup>2</sup> Additional information on input received to date is available on-line at <http://www.atlantaregional.com/transportation/plan-2040/what-weve-heard/>

## Appendix B

### **PLAN 2040 Potential Plan Direction/Focus Areas**

1. Promote sustainable and energy-efficient land development and transportation investments.
2. Assure the preservation, maintenance, and operation of the existing transportation system.
3. Focus resources and public investments in existing communities.
4. Through regional infrastructure planning, limit growth in undeveloped areas of the region.
5. Encourage a variety of choices related to housing and transportation.
6. At strategic regional locations, plan and retain industrial and freight land uses.
7. Increase the number and variety of uses around existing and planned transit stations.
8. Conserve and protect environmentally-sensitive areas and increase the amount and connectivity of greenspace.
9. Promote alternatives and efficiencies of the existing transportation system before adding capacity.

## Appendix C

### Plan 2040 Regional Assessment – Key Findings

1. The region is well-positioned for an economic recovery, but only if we're willing to adjust how we live and do business.
2. The long-term economic success of the region is directly tied to the availability of water.
3. The region needs significant transportation investments and increased housing availability in major employment centers.
4. The region does not have the financial capacity to expand further if it expects to meet the needs of its people and communities.
5. The composition of the region's 8 million residents in 2040 will be very different from the population of today.
6. The new housing market will shift toward communities that offer abundant amenities close to employment and cultural opportunities.
7. Approximately 75% of the region's residents have no other option but to drive to almost any destination.
8. Not only does the region need increased funds for transportation, but also better management of existing assets.
9. The region must focus on both urbanized areas and conservation areas.

<b>Potential Directions/Focus Areas for Plan 2040</b>	<b>Related Regional Assessment Key Findings</b>
Promote sustainable and energy-efficient development and transportation investments	1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9
Assure the preservation, maintenance, and operations of the existing transportation system	1, 4, 8
Focus resources and public investments in existing communities	3, 4, 6, 7, 9
Through regional infrastructure planning, limit growth in undeveloped areas of the region	1, 4, 6, 7, 9
Encourage a variety of choices related to housing and transportation for all income groups and ages	3, 5, 6, 7
At strategic regional locations, plan and retain industrial and freight land uses	1, 3, 8
Advance density and a mix of uses at existing and planned high capacity transit locations	1 - 9
Conserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas and increase the amount and connectivity of greenspace	1, 2, 6, 9
Promote alternatives and efficiencies of the existing transportation system before adding capacity	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8

## Appendix D

### Evaluation and Feedback Results

<b>How satisfied are you with tonight's forum?</b>	
very satisfied	7
satisfied	10
neither	2
dissatisfied	0
very dissatisfied	0
<b>Did you learn something new about our region?</b>	
yes	13
no	6
unsure	0
<b>How committed are you to staying involved?</b>	
very committed	6
committed	10
neither	3
uncommitted	0
very uncommitted	0
<b>How confident are you that Plan 2040 will be successful?</b>	
very confident	1
confident	5
neither	6
skeptical	7
very skeptical	0