

## **Plan 2040 Neighborhood Forum Regional Neighborhood Summit, Downtown Atlanta**

September 25, 2010

On September 25, 2010, The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened the third of four Neighborhood Forums on the Atlanta Regional Commission's Plan 2040, a comprehensive plan currently under development to accommodate the region's population and economic growth sustainably over the next 30 years. Unlike previous "stand-alone" forums held in different corners of the region, this forum was both open to the public and offered as a workshop during The Civic League's annual Neighborhood Summit, which draws participants from across the 10-county region. The forum objectives were to 1) update participants on the ongoing development of Plan 2040, and 2) obtain their input on how the region should grow and how transportation funding should be invested. Thirty-eight people participated in the forum, working in five groups for about two hours.

Participants recorded their reactions and ideas related to the discussion on index cards. 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' motivations for attending the Plan 2040 forum reflected the wide range of interests represented at the Neighborhood Summit and included health issues, pedestrian issues, budget policy and the economy. The most common reason cited for attending the forum was an interest in transportation/transit issues, with a general interest in regional issues as a strong secondary motivation.
- When asked whether the region should focus on land use and transportation investments in existing job centers and commercial corridors while preserving rural areas, the majority of participants said "yes", citing redevelopment of town centers, transit and air quality as appropriate priorities and considerations for future growth.
- With regard to transportation funding, participants were told, "Our region has approximately \$169 billion in total transportation needs (\$56 billion for maintaining the existing system and \$113 billion for expansion) from now to the year 2040. Only approximately \$64 billion in funding is available." They were then asked, "How should our region invest its limited resources between road/transit maintenance and expansion?" Most agreed that maintenance should be the priority because, as one noted, "neglecting maintenance increases costs more in the long run [so] there is no choice but to fully fund maintenance." Several advocated for creating

additional funding through a various taxes and fees: “Raising revenue is key – a penny a gallon and a penny per parking meter and a penny per tire.”

### **Meeting Process**

Participants were welcomed by Civic League managing director Ellen Mayer. Ellen introduced ARC’s Community Outreach Manager Judy Dovers and Research Division Chief Mike Alexander, and facilitator Mattice Haynes. Mattice welcomed participants, gave them a brief overview of the agenda (Appendix A) 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.

Mike then gave forum participants an overview of Plan 2040, discussed growth projections for the next 30 years, and explained how the region would be transformed by various land use policies (Appendix B).

At the conclusion of Mike's presentation, Mattice gave the groups 20 minutes to respond, asking them: How should we grow? Should our region focus land use and transportation investments in existing job centers and commercial corridors while preserving rural areas? Why or why not?

Following this discussing, Mike made a second presentation regarding transportation funding and its limitations (Appendix B, cont’d). In essence: Our region has approximately \$169 billion in total transportation needs (\$56 billion for maintaining the existing system and \$113 billion for expansion) from now to the year 2040. Only approximately \$64 billion in funding is available. Mattice then asked groups to work through two questions:

- How should our region invest its limited resources between road/transit maintenance and expansion?
- What should be maintained or expanded and why?

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

In a follow-up question, the groups were asked what other options they might suggest for funding regional transportation.

At the end of the session, Judy 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**

- Interested in ARC transportation/transit plans
- Interested in ARC plan to pay for everything
- Interested in ARC pedestrian trails – how the studies done can be implemented –

financially

- Came because of the new plan for regional committees who set their own agendas for transportation and as a MARTA rep want to see how MARTA will be served in these regional committees
- Came because of interest and studies in public transit

#### Group 2

*No responses recorded.*

#### Group 3

- Specializing in transportation in graduate school, so I'm interested in transportation forum and planning
- Trying to network and help find solutions to current problems
- Concerns with most important topic: transportation
- Concerns with public transportation. Built platform on this (newly-elected official)

#### Group 4

- Came to hear others' opinions
- Fear outcomes if not informed
- Representing neighborhood and NPU-V; concerns over abandoned properties
- Interested in transportation issues
- Wanted to meet others with shared concerns and get information
- Interested in community's perspective

#### Group 5

- Active in community; interested in overall plan and how we will get there (management and funding). What is the reality?
- Studying health impacts on region
- Want Atlanta region to succeed.
- Wanted to get a sense of where the region is going and where I might fit in the process.
- Interested in alternative transportation

#### Group 6

- Want to hear about 2040 plan and learn about the future
- Learn how program connects neighborhoods
- Would like to leave great information for younger generations

- Professor who wants to listen and learn, and share information with students
- “Big transit guy” who wants to see change

**How should we grow?** Should our region focus land use and transportation investments in existing job centers and commercial corridors while preserving rural areas? Why or why not?

#### Group 1

- Yes, because it confines traffic and poor air quality to one area, and conserving rural farm land is of increasing value. Rural areas should be known to folks in and out of the city.
- Yes, 1) because density supports transit; and 2) because [he] disagrees with suburban-style development, as compared to urban or small town centers.
- Yes, because the town center/village concept supports quality of life.
- Redeveloping existing core neighborhoods is cheaper.

#### Group 2

- Yes, but leave options open (flexibility) should the need arise.
- Yes it should, but we have to be flexible. You need to focus in areas that are high density. It should be stressed in those centers, but we may need to build outside of the existing centers.
- Yes, but who will define the growth boundary?
- Yes, we should use the existing centers. We need to be ready for population growth.

#### Group 3

- Integrate highways and MARTA, i.e. GA 400 would have a train running down center
- Improve on infrastructure we have now.
- Focus more on including existing.
- Don't expand. Focus on existing.

#### Group 4

- Problem is multiple jurisdictions and local government will support any growth, i.e. local areas will not cede that growth to urban areas.
- Concern over sustainable H2O supply. ARC recently approved project near H2O supply inconsistent with stated policy – rural areas must be preserved...
- Yes, any other method won't work.
- Already complicated by lack of one urban core and how to retrofit
- Economically advantageous to invest where infrastructure already exists then can create transit system connecting this
- Current model is favoring suburbanization and this is not serving us well!

#### Group 5

- We need to keep our towns/centers alive.
- Every municipality should have diverse tax base. Be able to “live” within your own community (have a grocery store, etc.) We should have balanced communities. Quality, affordable housing near jobs.
- Yes. Focus on areas that give us jobs and growth. Need to balance growth. If we are going to preserve rural, focus on economic development and transit needs.
- Get rid of “disconnects” between Atlanta and rest of the state. We need to take care of it all.
- Need to focus on getting resources in CBD. People working there don’t pay for it.
- Protect economic engine of Atlanta
- Atlanta needs to increase population to increase political clout in state.
- Need to preserve rural for “restorative” reasons.
- Don’t need concentration only in downtown Atlanta. Focus on existing areas (main streets) and connect centers with transit.

#### Group 6

- Should even things out
- Public transit works better in New York than in Atlanta
- Agree with land use; further we go out, it’s not worth driving to the city.
- Move investments out instead of bringing people here.
- Bike paths
- Future job/residential areas make sure there is transportation there.
- Smart about where you put density, jobs, trains, etc.
- Rezoning
- People need to change minds on transportation usage.

Final discussion question: What other options should be considered to generate additional funding for transportation?

#### Group 1

- Raise fed, state gas tax; implement SPLOST to pay for needed improvements. It should not be a chose between maintenance and expansion.
- Place emphasis on improving/increasing non-highway modes of transportation and transportation demand management (in particular – increased parking fees, tele-work policies w/tax credits, and funding for buses/trains).
- Maintenance is cheaper than replacement – raising revenue is key – a penny a gallon and a penny per parking meter and a penny per tire.
- Expanded – light rail/MARTA cross-town buses

#### Group 2

- In a sense, this is a stupid question. Since neglecting maintenance increases costs in the long run, there is no choice but to fully fund maintenance.
- In reality, the question is between accepting what we have vs. finding more funding. Once you re-frame the debate that way, the answer is that multi-mode transit (trains and bikes) should be

expanded but not roads (because increased road capacity just fills up and makes the sprawl worse).

- New funding should come from increase in gas tax (but not be used on roads), or a vehicle-miles travelled tax but using odometer readings – NOT GPS tracking!!
- Since the existing plan can't be completely funded, we need to redirect the funds to the forms of transportation that can.
- Most of the funds should be invested in existing centers because once the rural areas are gone, they're gone. We need to understand how all things are connected and we can't sacrifice one thing at the expense of the other.

#### Group 3

*No responses recorded.*

#### Group 4

- Don't like the question. "Unbuckle" road and transit; cannot give everything to everyone. Choices need to favor non-automobile modes as much as possible.
- Public input is not taken into account.
- Define transit. Streetcars, buses, commuter rail must create networks.
- Prefer maintenance unless there is expansion money to build out transit.

#### Group 5

- Maintain highways.
- Expand as we grow.
- Invest in maintenance where it makes sense and invest in expansion where it makes sense.
- Use MARTA as a jumping off point for transit expansion.
- Be more willing to raise taxes specifically for maintenance and expansion (invest in both).
- Targeted maintenance and expansion. Existing transit should be kept operational. We have overbuilt highways. Road diets.
- Critical expansions to provide true mode choice. This may limit congestion growth in a lot of areas.
- Focus on non-auto solutions that aren't as expensive (e.g. bike and pedestrian improvements in target areas).
- Investment in alternative modes will lessen the need for highway maintenance.
- Use tolls for highway maintenance
- Higher parking fees
- Holistic approach (what will keep Atlanta and Georgia viable?)
- Atlanta grew out of strategic transportation. Get back to that.
- Capitalize on existing infrastructure.
- Focus on removing "hurdles" (too much red tape and politics in region)
- Better connections within existing system
- Focus on local solutions (that's how we got MARTA)
- Make sure regional approaches benefit everyone in region.

Group 6

- Maintain highways and use savings for targeted expansion
- Expand MARTA (similar to Charlotte) into Gwinnett and outlying job centers – commuter rail
- Individual communities come together to fix their own stuff
- Connectivity

The last question posed to the group was a multiple-choice question included in the program evaluation form:

How should our region invest its limited resources between road/transit MAINTENANCE and EXPANSION? (Choose ONE): *(answers noted below in parentheses)*

- All available funding going to road and transit MAINTENANCE (2)
- All available funding going to road and transit EXPANSION (1)
- Available funding evenly divided between MAINTENANCE and EXPANSION (7)
- More available funding going to road and transit MAINTENANCE (4)
- More available funding going to road and transit system EXPANSION (3)

**Snapshot of Participants**

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

<b>Demographic Snapshot (31/33 forms turned in)</b>	
Male	15
Female	16
Under 18	0
18 to 24	3
25 to 39	5
40 to 54	10
55 to 65	11
Over 65	2
White	15
Black	11
Asian	4
Hispanic	3
Other	1
Native American	0

## Appendix A



# Neighborhood Forum

September 25, 2010  
1:45 PM - 3:30 PM  
2010 Neighborhood Summit  
Loudermilk Center for the Regional Community  
40 Courtland Street  
Atlanta, GA 30303

<p><u>Objectives:</u></p> <p>(1) To provide an update on the development of Plan 2040.</p> <p>(2) To obtain input from the public on how our region should grow and how transportation funding should be invested.</p>	<p><u>Ground Rules:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate actively</li><li>• Share talk time</li><li>• Listen with respect</li><li>• Stay focused</li><li>• Silence cell phones</li></ul>
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## Agenda

- Welcome and Overview
- Table Discussion: Introductions & Motivations
- Presentation: Plan 2040, Who Will We Be, and Where Will We Grow?
- Q&A
- Table Discussion: How Should We Grow?
- Presentation: Transportation Funding
- Table Discussion: Transportation Funding
- Evaluation and Closing Comments

### **Table Discussion: Introductions & Motivations**

Briefly share your name, county you live in, and your motivations for attending this session

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**How Should We Grow?**

Should our region focus land use and transportation investments in existing job centers and commercial corridors while preserving rural areas? Why or why not?

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**Transportation Funding**

*Our region has approximately \$169 billion in total transportation needs (\$56 billion for maintaining the existing system and \$113 billion for expansion) from now to the year 2040. Only approximately \$64 billion in funding is available.*

How should our region invest its limited resources between road/transit  
MAINTENANCE and EXPANSION?

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What should be maintained or expanded and WHY?

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**Evaluation and Feedback --- COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS PAGE TO STAFF**

How should our region invest its limited resources between road/transit MAINTENANCE and EXPANSION? (Choose ONE)

- All available funding going to road and transit MAINTENANCE
- All available funding going to road and transit EXPANSION
- Available funding evenly divided between MAINTENANCE and EXPANSION
- More available funding going to road and transit MAINTENANCE
- More available funding going to road and transit system EXPANSION

<p>How satisfied are you with today's forum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very satisfied</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Satisfied</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dissatisfied</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very dissatisfied</li> </ul>	<p>Did you learn something new about our region?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</li> </ul>
<p>How committed are you to staying involved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very committed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Committed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Neither committed nor uncommitted</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Uncommitted</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very uncommitted</li> </ul>	<p>How confident are you that Plan 2040 will be successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very confident</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Confident</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Neither confident nor skeptical</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Skeptical</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Very skeptical</li> </ul>

What worked especially well at today's forum?

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We have one more Plan 2040 forum later this year. What do you suggest we do differently to improve the experience for participants?

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In 2011, the Atlanta Regional Commission will host additional Plan 2040 forums. In which areas of the region should we host these forums?

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