

Mayor Shirley Franklin
55 Trinity Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30303

September 18, 2008

Subject: Connect Atlanta Plan Concerns

Dear Mayor Franklin,

We have both attended all the Connect Atlanta Plan (CAP) meetings for our area. We found it most encouraging that the City is conducting a comprehensive traffic and transportation plan for the City. The City and region have serious traffic problems today and, with the growth that we will inevitably experience in coming decades, it will take skillful planning to navigate our future challenges.

We have appreciated it that the City's planning effort has been designed to be public and open. That is the way it should be done. We, the citizens of the city, should be able to share important insights into our neighborhoods' needs and share our concerns. Further, we will have to pay for and live with whatever is ultimately done.

Concern: Information needed by the public has not been provided

The CAP Team is now conducting or has recently completed its "final" public review meetings. At the recent Buckhead meeting, the team announced that maps had been finally made available (just the previous day) which identify draft CAP projects as of last July. This late availability of the maps meant that the vast majority of the audience had not seen them. Since then, we have reviewed those maps and find them to include significant items which were never shown or mentioned in the "final" review meetings. Additionally, narrative descriptions of the projects and a listing of tentative priorities which are needed to fully understand the maps have not been provided to the public, even though they were made available in an earlier briefing to the City Council. One of us (Gordon) has made several requests by e-mail to the CAP Team asking for the narrative descriptions and priority lists, but the narratives have not been made available and the priorities became available only in the last day or two.

So, in spite of the CAP's high goals for public involvement and consensus building, citizens throughout Atlanta have been put in a bad position. To put it succinctly, how can the public review and comment on the CAP recommendations if they haven't been provided information about them at review time?

We would appreciate your action to determine what can be done at this late date to restore the citizen's role in meaningful decision making. We all want to be able to provide informed support or informed opposition to the projects included in this important comprehensive transportation plan.

Concern: Inadequate regional connectivity

We have concerns about the CAP's lack of emphasis on regional connectivity and concentration on comparatively minor redevelopment projects. The most significant problem we have in the northern part of the City is the absence of adequate interconnections with other counties to the northeast, east, northwest and west or even to some parts of the city to the south.

GA400/I-85 INTERCHANGE: The single biggest traffic problem we have in Buckhead is that the GA400/I-85 interchange was never completed. We have endured all of the pain of having neighborhoods bisected by GA400 and seeing important street connections removed. But our pain is compounded by the fact that the job was never completed and the result doesn't work well. As a result, important roads such as Piedmont, Lenox and Roxboro are overwhelmed with unnecessary traffic which is basically just trying to get from one expressway to another.

The tolls on GA400, which should rightfully go to pay for completion of this interchange, are slated to expire in 2011. The City should be making this interchange a very high priority so that this funding source won't be lost. Yet, at the CAP recent meeting, we fought to have this project even

included at all as a CAP project. If 85/400 were completed, some of the other CAP work planned for Piedmont, Lenox and Roxboro might not be needed or might be reduced in scope. The CAP should embrace the completion of 400/85 interchange as a cornerstone of its regional commitment.

EAST-WEST CONNECTION: Connections from Buckhead to the regions west and north are a subtler problem, yet one that requires vision and creative solutions. The premise of CAP is that Atlanta's population will grow by 60% and it is entirely reasonable to assume that nearby counties such as Cobb will experience similar growth. Today, according to Georgia Trend, Buckhead's population doubles (to 140,000) on workdays as commuters come to their jobs. Rush hour traffic is saturating the major residential streets (such as West Paces Ferry). These residential streets are the only connection to job centers in Buckhead for commuters coming in from I-75 and beyond. A significant increase in this traffic will be devastating to the neighborhoods and would represent a real challenge to the business community's need to secure and retain qualified workers – a lack of action on our "East-West Connection" is a threat to both the business community and to the neighborhoods. The CAP Team spent a lot of time on this problem, prominently depicting it on several Powerpoints. The Team rightly concluded that widening streets like West Paces Ferry and Powers Ferry was not a viable solution. But, the current CAP offers us little east-west relief except possibly improving one knotty intersection and adding a looping train route with a number of stops and train changes – we don't think riders will use a service that's not direct enough. Without a resolution of this problem, businesses may gravitate to more hospitable sites outside of Atlanta.

But there may be hope. We noticed that the regional plan provides light rail type transit from Cobb to Atlanta on the I-75 right of way, relatively near (3½ miles) the Buckhead job center. Since new streets are not a possibility, it occurred to us that a direct subway tunnel connection from the I-75 transit to the Buckhead MARTA station area might be a solution. A properly designed subway could avoid the size and expense of a MARTA-style heavy rail solution, yet would be direct enough to attract riders unwilling to use a complicated, time consuming looping transit ride to the south to get to work. Such a system needn't be elaborate: simply provide a station to let passengers get off the Cobb to Brookwood I-75 train, take an escalator underground, board the Buckhead subway, and after a five to ten minute ride, take the escalator up to the surface in Buckhead. And, being bored underground, a tunnel would not require the disruption, congestion and cost of new or widened surface roads. Further, public opposition would be largely avoided.

The CAP Team provided cost estimates amounting to roughly \$1 to \$1.5 billion for our short tunnel solution, amounts so enormous as to take our breath away. These estimates included \$230 million a mile for boring the tunnel and larger amounts for underground stations at each end. Yet we know that the basically similar Nancy Creek Sewer Tunnel (without stations) took only \$135 million for 8½ miles of tunnel. We think that a streamlined, simpler and far less costly underground connection could be a key initiative of CAP. If, because of limited time, we can't include a detailed tunnel specification in the CAP at this time, it should, at a minimum, include this project as an important yet undefined future objective. The vitality of the Buckhead region depends on a realistic, long-term East-West solution and the project's relatively large cost should be seen in that context.

In summary, if the Connect Atlanta Plan fails to take on the problematic GA400/I-85 intersection, and to deal with our East-West need, it cannot be called either comprehensive or regional. If we don't get the information we need to understand it, CAP won't have public buy-in, either. Please help us.

Sincerely,

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