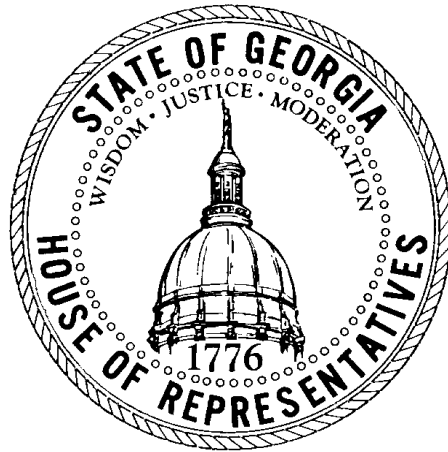


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# Guiding Principles For A Regional Transit System In Georgia



## *Preliminary Report*

**Joint Transit Governance  
Study Commission**

***REP. DONNA SHELDON***  
***CHAIRMAN***

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# *Joint Transit Governance Study Commission*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction .....	3
II.	Schedule of Meetings .....	3
III.	Executive Summary .....	3
IV.	Guiding Principles .....	5
V.	Conclusion .....	6
VI.	Signature of Report .....	6

# *Joint Transit Governance Study Commission*

## INTRODUCTION

The Joint Transit Governance Study Commission was created through the Statewide Regional Transportation Funding Bill, HB 277, with the expressed duty to examine the methodical development of a regional transit governing authority in Georgia through specific legislative proposals. In order to identify the best possible system for the growth and development of Georgia's transit network a series of meetings have been held in order to hear testimony from Georgia's current transit providers as well as providers from other states. In satisfaction of the requirements of HB 277, the following preliminary report includes an analysis of Georgia's current transit system as well as a list of guiding principles that the commission believes should be used in order to determine the most efficient and capable system for the State of Georgia.

## MEETING SCHEDULE

Meeting 1: September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Coverdell Legislative Office Building Room # 606

Meeting 2: September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Coverdell Legislative Office Building Room # 606

Meeting 3: December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Coverdell Legislative Office Building Room # 606

Working Meeting: December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Capitol Building Room # 417

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Joint Transit Governance Study Commission was authorized by House Bill 277 and is comprised of seventeen (17) members including State Senators, State Representatives, Transit Providers, Statewide and Regional Spokespersons and the Mayor of Atlanta. For the purposes of all conversations involving the term "transit" the Commission agrees with the definition provided by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), publicly accessible land-based transportation of passengers and their incidental baggage by any means other than vehicles for hire. Members of the Commission understand their task is to establish a framework for future legislation that creates a transit governance structure that maximizes current funding availability, reacts to local guidance, and utilizes alternative funding sources, market coordination, and regional strategic planning.

The Commission realizes that transit is one of the tools necessary to address the transportation needs of the region. According to the Andrew Young School of Policy Research, a total of 335 miles of freeway (interstate) and 2,820 miles of arterial street lane were added from 1995 to 2007. The Texas Transportation Institute ranked Atlanta as the 3<sup>rd</sup> worst city for travel congestion in 1995, and despite the significant addition of lanes it maintained its position again in 2007. It is imperative, given the limited funds available to transit, that the Commission continues its work to discover a governance structure that meets its intended goals.

Any conversation regarding transit in Metro Atlanta must begin with a clear perspective of the complex transit systems as they exist today. The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), since its creation in 1971, has served primarily the residents of Fulton and DeKalb counties through bus routes and heavy commuter rail. Over time though, other organizations have developed and provide transit support including the Georgia Regional Transit Authority (GRTA) and various county transit operators such as Cobb, Gwinnett, and Cherokee. Each of these later developing groups operate solely through bus transit, but in the last several years additional rail operators such as the Atlanta Beltline, Inc. and the recently announced and Department of Transportation funded Atlanta Streetcar Project have engaged various levels of funding to provide rail transit services within the City of Atlanta. Although neither of these final two entities are yet operational, they must be

# *Joint Transit Governance Study Commission*

included in the perspective of a regional transit governance system which seeks to maximize the efficiency of all its various parts while keeping to a minimum the public costs to manage and operate the system.

In order to understand the enormous importance transit systems have upon the interconnectivity and economic development of the Atlanta region, one only needs to see the number of total “trips” provided by the operating entities. In 2009, the five largest transit providers (MARTA, GRTA, CCT, GCT, and Cherokee County Transit) combined to provide approximately 165 million “trips” for the citizens and visitors to the Metro Atlanta Region.

The latest census data, provided in December 2010, also helps to frame the need for a comprehensive regional structure. Georgia is currently the 9<sup>th</sup> largest state in the Union and has seen an 18% increase in its population since 2000. A quick analysis of county-by-county growth projections from 2009\* shows that of the ten-county “Atlanta region” used in the Statewide Regional Transportation Funding Act, HB 277, these ten counties will have grown at an expected rate of 30%.

The result is simple, despite the large volume of transit “trips” that have already been established the need for efficient and cost-effective management of those trips is necessary for transit services to survive and flourish, and provide the greatest amount of economic support for not only Atlanta and the region, but for the entire state. Improvements to the delivery of transit services to the region will serve to increase the available labor pool for area employers, provide transportation to the aging population, the disabled population, tourist and visitors to the State. According to a 2007 study conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at The University of Georgia, MARTA provided an estimated \$2.1 billion impact to Georgia’s economy. In 2009 the American Public Transportation Association found that for every \$1 invested in public transportation \$4 is generated in economic returns. This Commission realizes however, that without a stable, efficient governance structure whose focus will be the continuation and expansion of transit modes with a regional perspective, that investment will be squandered and the entire network, all of its individual systems, and the state as a whole, will suffer from the loss.

Numerous studies by industry experts have been commissioned on Atlanta’s transit network. One such study, the Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan, identifies three equally important components needed to facilitate the most effective system of mobility for the area’s residents and visitors: demand management; supply expansion focused on employment centers and reliable modes; and the coordination of infrastructure investments that will align with future development patterns. Accepting the importance of these components is crucial for the implementation of a system that is not only the best fit for today, but is flexible enough to accommodate growth that will become necessary as more and more people move into our area. It is the intention of this Commission to integrate these key components into the heart of a new governance structure.

Furthermore, despite the well-documented focus of transit within the “Atlanta region”, this body cannot approach transit governance without understanding that all transit systems, even the smallest of routes, must be able to operate in order to maximize the economic development that is inherent in all forms of transit. To that end, the Commission will work diligently to ensure that all providers, regardless of the size and scope of their service to the people of Georgia, will be able to thrive within the governance system which is enacted.

The Joint Transit Governance Study Commission is committed to discovering the best possible structure for the citizens of Georgia, and although much time and effort has already been spent in examining the problems and benefits of various systems, more analysis must be done. This is only a preliminary report that focuses on broad guidelines that will shape an eventual coordinated network which seeks to maximize mobility of people using

# *Joint Transit Governance Study Commission*

an affordable, sustainable funding method. To provide for anything less would be risking the future growth of our entire state and that risk is too great to act without due diligence. The symptoms that hinder our current transit systems did not appear overnight, nor will they be solved immediately. The Commission understands its responsibilities and will continue in the coming year to seek input from transit providers and their recipients, as well as public leaders, concerned coalitions, and the public at large, and will in due time provide its legislative suggestions for the best possible course of action.

\*County by county data from the 2010 census was not yet available at the time of this report.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Transit Governance Study Commission determines that in order to move forward with a regional public transportation system that meets the growing needs of Georgia's citizens and visitors to our state, the following six principles should be incorporated in any recommendations to the Georgia General Assembly in reforming a regional transit governance structure.

1. The regional transit authority should work to create a strategic transit vision that improves coordination of services throughout the region and employs a partnership with the Regional Transportation Roundtable and the Federal government including the Federal Transit Administration.
2. The regional transit governing board must provide fair and equitable representation from the communities and residents which make up the region.
3. The viable legal entity which provides for the Atlanta region's transit infrastructure growth and operation should do so without triggering defaults under bond documents and certain other financial agreements, governmental agreements, and governmental contracts.
4. Any regional transit authority should include a certain minimum percentage of private contracts that will make up the system's daily transit operation network. This procedure will promote competitive bidding for transit operations that will ultimately be advantageous to the people of the transportation region.
5. A regional transit authority statutory framework should foster and incorporate public/private partnerships focused on expansion, operation, efficiency, and support systems similar to the recent successful growth and operation of the Colorado RTD. These partnerships have proven to be critical factors in the acquisition of Federal Transit Administration funds and similarly critical to the overall mission of providing the best possible transit network to the people of the Atlanta transportation region and to the people of Georgia.
6. Adopt a governing framework which requires accountability within the organization through an independent performance auditing process every three (3) years. The framework should also require transparent reporting of operation and financial expenditures as otherwise required by state and federal law. Furthermore the framework should resist the seemingly natural growth of administration rosters within publicly run entities by capping the percentage of employees defined as administration relevant to the overall workforce.

# *Joint Transit Governance Study Commission*

## CONCLUSION

The preceding report of the Joint Transit Governance Study Commission is only a preliminary dialogue with regards to the discussion of a regional transit governance structure. The Commission will continue to meet throughout 2011 until its completion deadline, or a consensus can be reached.

## **RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**

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Rep. Donna Sheldon, Chairman  
House District 105