Fast Facts

On average, states contribute 12% of the capital funds and 23% of the operating funds for transit networks. Georgia provided 1% of the capital funds and 0% of MARTA's operating funds in 2006.

85% of metro Atlanta residents believe that increased investment in public transportation would strengthen the economy and reduce traffic.

In its first year of operation, Charlotte's $500 million light rail line has generated $1.8 billion in new and proposed development, added tens of millions of dollars in new property tax revenue, and exceeded ridership estimates by 186%.

For More Information:
Mothers & Others for Clean Air at the Georgia Conservancy, Rebecca Watts Hull

Sierra Club, Georgia Chapter, Mark Woodall or Neill Herring

Southern Environmental Law Center, Brian Gist

Citizens for Progressive Transit, Lee Biola

Fund Transportation and Transit for a Brighter Economic Future

What's at Stake?

Atlanta's sprawl and gridlock are legendary. Air pollution is becoming a statewide problem. And maintenance of the state's existing transportation infrastructure is uncertain as the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) faces unprecedented funding shortfalls. All of these problems are the result of the way Georgia approaches and funds its transportation network. Inadequate investment in public transportation and an auto-centric approach to transportation threaten air quality, contribute to obesity, induce sprawl, lower quality of life and impair Georgia's ability to compete with other large metropolitan areas for new businesses.

Air pollution is linked to serious health problems including respiratory and heart diseases, cancer, premature death, and reduced lung function growth in children. And while it is difficult to estimate all the economic costs of air pollution, many estimates put that figure in the billions. At the same time, the state's attempts to build its way out of congestion have failed to clear the roads. Georgia's business leaders worry that our poor air quality and clogged roadways are already deterring leading corporations and organizations looking to relocate in the Southeast from considering Georgia for their new home.

Challenges

In March 2008, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency strengthened the federal standard for ozone pollution. The Augusta, Athens, Columbus and Macon regions are likely to join the greater metro Atlanta area in failing to attain this new standard. The air quality improvement due to clean fuels and vehicles has been offset by the increasing number of vehicles and the increasing distances people drive. As many of the easy-to-implement emission controls are already in place, it is highly unlikely that most of Georgia's larger cities will be able to meet the new ozone standard without a different approach to transportation and greater investment in our public transportation infrastructure.

Addressing Georgia's transportation problem will require creative and varied mechanisms for expanding the state's investment in public transportation, offering alternatives to car travel both between and within towns and cities.

Next Steps

- The legislature should remove limitations on how and where transportation funds can be spent to ensure that existing transportation dollars are used most effectively.
- During the 2008 Session, the General Assembly came within a few votes of passing a Constitutional Amendment that would have dedicated one percent of the General Sales Tax on Motor Fuel to "all transportation purposes" and would have allowed local governments to work together to fund joint transportation projects, including their operating costs, through a new locally levied Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes (TSPLOST). Legislators need to pass these measures in 2009.
- The legislature should pass legislation that would give MARTA greater flexibility in the use of its tax revenue to enable the system to enhance services and attract new riders.