

## Neighborhood Forum

### Southwest Cobb

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta convened a Neighborhood Forum on May 12, 2009 in Southwest Cobb County, at the Ford Center Reception Hall in Powder Springs. This forum was in support of the Atlanta Regional Commission's Fifty Forward visioning initiative and was focused on a major question facing the region in the next 50 years: How can we accommodate growth and improve mobility? Forty-three people participated in the Southwest Cobb forum. In the course of two hours, participants worked in small groups of 8 to 10 on a series of questions that helped them think about how the region can accommodate growth and increase mobility.

By the end of the evening, they had recorded 164 ideas, which are listed later in this report. Some of the most common themes of this meeting were:

- **The need for more public transit and easier-to-use transit.** Every small group mentioned the need for more public transit, including a large expansion of rail transit. "Mass transit to take you to where you need to go," was one group's vision. "Expansion of all mass transit so all have access," was another's vision. But one group emphasized the need for a "user-friendly" transit system. It urged transit officials to "educate through free tours, school field trips, etc. Make it familiar."
- With more transit, citizens also urged **more cooperative regional planning.** "Standardize the transportation agenda between counties," one group urged. Another suggested that governments "lay out a matrix of where to locate facilities, types of facilities (and) focus on growth and better zoning." Yet another suggested simply "regional leadership" as a solution.
- There was support for **walkable, dense, mixed-use development** that would reduce the need for automobile travel. "Live-work-play-learn communities," one group said, would "decrease the need for transportation." And communities could be redesigned for multiple ways of moving around, another group said, including "walk (sidewalks, trails), bike (bike lanes, trails), Segways, golf carts, monorail, cars (parking outside of centers)." In addition to reducing the need for conventional auto travel, one group said, such "mixed-use neighborhoods (build a) sense of community."

### Meeting Process

Participants were welcomed by Myles Smith, executive director of the Civic League for Regional Atlanta, who turned the program over to Jon Abercrombie, the meeting facilitator. Jon explained that participants would work in small groups or "circles" of 8 to 10 people and would be asked to think about, discuss and

come to consensus on several questions. Each group selected a “moderator” to act as facilitator and write the group’s comments on a large flip-chart pad.

The first question Jon asked was part of a scenario. Its purpose was to help the groups imagine how the region would look and work in 2058, if it were successful in accommodating growth and improving mobility. Here’s the scenario:

*In 2058 iMag, the leading news web site of the 21st century, comes to our region to write about how the Atlanta Region has become a model for accommodating growth while making it easier each year to move people and goods around the metro area.*

Here’s the question Jon posed to the groups:

*What does iMag photograph, videotape and write about? What lessons does it find that other regions could learn from?*

Jon gave the groups 50 minutes to work on this question. As they were finishing, Jon asked the groups to look over the ideas and images they had listed and highlight the ones they felt most reflected the rough consensus of the group – and also place a mark next to the one or two that they thought might be their most visionary ideas.



In the remainder of the meeting, Jon asked the groups to consider two other questions:

- *What do we need to preserve among things that already exist in the Atlanta Region today for the iMag article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*
- *What do we need to change in the Atlanta Region for the iMag article (and our vision of the future) to come true?*

The results of these three group discussions (a general vision of how the Atlanta Region could accommodate growth and increase mobility, the assets that should be preserved and things that should be changed) are in the following three sections of this report.

### **Small Group Results: A Vision of Transportation for the Atlanta Region**

Here are the things participants felt iMag would focus on, if it were writing about the Atlanta region as the ideal or model region in 2058.

#### Small Group 1:

- Smaller cars
- More efficient cars
- Infrastructure supports alternate fuels
- Rapid rail for people and goods - heavy for goods, light rail for commuting, with skip & stop commuter service
- Transportation planning - lay out a matrix of where to locate facilities, types of facilities - focus on growth and better zoning
- Bike trails and lanes - silver comet trail, used for both recreation and transportation - consider: STREET | SIDEWALK | BIKE TRAIL
- Better bus service (privatize MARTA) - streamline stations and way we do business
- Commuter park/ride lots - include car sharing, day lsg, zip cars
- Preservation of green space
- More express lanes (HOV) - special service lanes, eg, KSU
- More toll lanes - charge by time of day
- Truck lanes
- Double deck roads
- Incentives to companies to stagger work schedules
- Privately owned roads - charge to ride
- Synchronization of traffic lights - Chastain/Frey roads at KSU - adaptive traffic control - state of the art transportation systems
- Cobb County traffic Twitter - Twitter to GPS - digital directional info at traffic lights
- Monorail up I-75
- Grid systems

#### Small Group 2:

- Rail or bus system - Atlanta is a well-connected city - can hop on streetcars to get to where you're going
- Atlanta and surrounding cities in region are connected by maglev
- Rail is accepted as a normal mode of transportation
- Build new routes exclusive for freight traffic - possibly tunnels
- MARTA expands to Douglasville
- Virtual meetings more common - business incentives - libraries can accommodate - can mix live and virtual - meeting center like a concert hall, but for business
- Collaboration between local governments brings better transportation - Standardize the transportation agenda between counties
- Powder Springs is served by a bus system
- More people, children get out and walk, get exercise

- Safe for bicycles
- Commuter rail to Griffin, Douglasville
- Physically separated bike lanes
- Golf carts are used for more local trips
- The system is integrated - bus, train schedules - all transportation, flex time, etc.
- Easier to use busses, trains - educate through free tours, school field trips, etc. - make it familiar
- Must resolve the fear of Atlanta
- Etiquette within the city is common knowledge
- There is greater police presence
- Introduce adults who don't ride the bus to start riding, become familiar
- Cultural norms are as real as steel rail, therefore we must work to break down barriers - Cultural diversity classes help break down these barriers - Meetings like this bring people of a common interest together

Small Group 3:

- Higher density of dwellings, mixed-use
- Give up individual car use
- Spoke system into center - speed from point and center - mass transit
- High-speed cars get put on train that takes us point to point - maybe not train, but an escalator, or parts that hook up and split off - computerized system - I dial up where I want to get off - major interstates have this train
- Two systems: people and goods
- Tag/radio frequency chip on all goods for destination
- "Cat" - punch destination in, sit down and go to sleep, eat, etc.
- How we do not need to travel - destinations and residents are in clusters
- Clusters have places for: walking, greenspace, 1,000 homes, schools, able to grow food, going up (high-rise living), and still have rural area
- Maybe increase growing and making locally - would help have quality time with family
- High-speed rail to replace air travel to connect Atlanta to other cities - government facilitate this and private enterprise operate
- Have referendum to vote on high speed rail
- How do we pay for this? Who has eminent domain?
- Have more of a regional government - not just 24 county Atlanta regional government
- More freeways - 150 mph to Augusta, Macon, Columbus, Savannah
- State actions funded with taxes - toll road - people using pay for improvements, at least
- Need impact fee for all development
- Build development - also pay for all services needed
- Need more brainstorming with largest group possible
- Need more cooperation among communities, states, etc.
- More park and rides, carpools in every neighborhood
- Expansion of all mass transit so all have access - all have to pay to ride - cheaper mass transit - maglev - fast, cheap, put down on center of highway, elevated

- Getting buy-in from residents to leave individualism behind - work together and listen
- Live-work-play-learn communities decrease the need for transportation
- Dilemma: how to get more regional planning, cooperation, support, coordination and still limit government

Small Group 4:

- Movable pods
- Commuter rail - not just going in two directions
- Golf cart travel on small roads
- Alternate fuel vehicles
- Rail connecting cities - Birmingham, Macon, Chattanooga
- Put cars on long-distance rail
- Mandatory sidewalks
- Be able to walk to schools
- Mixed-use neighborhoods
- Mass transit to take you to where you need to go
- Layers of mass transit that are connected
- Efficient roads
- Opportunity to work from home
- Sense of community
- Regional planning - big picture
- Housing, transportation, retail infrastructure planning at the same time
- More than one option for transportation
- Greenspace
- Bike lanes
- Impact studies on schools, housing, retail - school boards, planners work together
- Regional leadership
- One transportation agency
- Explicit cost to driving - tolls
- Efficient rail system
- Auto train for long distance travel
- Mixed-use neighborhoods - sense of community



Small Group 5:

- Livable centers - live work and play - walk (sidewalks, trails), bike (bike lanes, trails), segways, golf carts, monorail, cars (parking outside of centers)
- Focus on incentives for living here
- Shorter commutes (money savings)
- Business discounts for living in livable centers
- Free, discounted alternative transportation
- Tax incentives - developer, resident
- Reduction in stress - exercise
- Videoconferencing for schools
- Density - zoning
- Work at home
- Government provides incentives for businesses that allow work at home opportunities
- Reduction of work week - increased hours?
- Work week no longer in businesses where production is the key component - targets, goals, attainment - needs a change in mindset
- Outside livable centers - use rapid rail moving from city to city - once there, can use rental vehicles, rail/bus system within city, taxi cabs
- Alternative fuel sources
- Clean air, water
- Government standards, regulations and incentives that move the fuel producers and automotive industry toward being environmentally sensitive
- Consumer incentives continue, increase to use, purchase fuel efficient vehicles, fuels
- Mandatory phase out of fossil fuels
- Smart cars, smart roads, Disney as a good example

### **Consensus Ideas**

Here are the ideas, from those listed above, that the groups felt reflected a consensus of their thinking:

- Transportation planning - lay out a matrix of where to locate facilities, types of facilities - focus on growth and better zoning
- Incentives to companies to stagger work schedules
- Synchronization of traffic lights - Chastain/Frey roads at KSU - adaptive traffic control - state of the art transportation systems
- Rail or bus system - Atlanta is a well-connected city - can hop on streetcars to get to where you're going
- Collaboration between local governments brings better transportation - Standardize the transportation agenda between counties
- Easier to use busses, trains - educate through free tours, school field trips, etc. - make it familiar
- Spoke system into center - speed from point and center - mass transit
- Expansion of all mass transit so all have access - all have to pay to ride - cheaper mass transit - maglev - fast, cheap, put down on center of highway, elevated
- Live-work-play-learn communities decrease the need for transportation
- Mixed-use neighborhoods

- Mass transit to take you to where you need to go
- Sense of community
- Regional leadership
- Efficient rail system
- Mixed-use neighborhoods - sense of community
- Livable centers - live work and play - walk (sidewalks, trails), bike (bike lanes, trails), segways, golf carts, monorail, cars (parking outside of centers)
- Work at home
- Alternative fuel sources

### **Visionary Ideas**

Here are the ideas, from those listed above, that the groups felt were their most visionary or “out of the box” ideas:

- Cobb County traffic Twitter - Twitter to GPS - digital directional info at traffic lights
- Build new routes exclusive for freight traffic - possibly tunnels
- Golf carts are used for more local trips
- High-speed cars get put on train that takes us point to point - maybe not train, but an escalator, or parts that hook up and split off - computerized system - I dial up where I want to get off - major interstates have this train
- Auto train for long distance travel
- Smart cars, smart roads, Disney as a good example



### **Small-Group Results: Existing Assets That Should Be Preserved**

Here are existing community assets that participants felt should be preserved, if the Atlanta Region is to become a model for mobility in 2058. These things could include physical assets, organizations or institutions, public policies or decisions, or positive traits or skills of the people who live here now.

Small Group 1:

- Green space
- Housing choices (high-rise, single family, attached)
- Historical sites
- Chattahoochee corridor, recreation area

Small Group 2:

- Rail right of way
- Community feel
- Country close to city
- Greenspace, trees
- Layout of interstates

Small Group 3:

- Going green
- Ability to walk
- Water
- Family oriented communities
- Communities with uniqueness, flavor
- Financial stability of communities

Small Group 4:

- Greenspace
- Walkability
- Interstate commerce

Small Group 5:

- Greenspace, passive areas
- Water
- Options for personal choices - shop, play where I want
- Schools
- Public services - police, fire, libraries, etc.
- Charity among residents, governments

**Small-Group Results: Things That Should Be Changed**

Here are things that participants felt would need to be changed if the Atlanta Region were to become a model for mobility in 2058.

Small Group 1:

- Denser community
- Less retail centers
- Civil service quality, training
- Zoning code
- Sidewalks - pedestrian access
- Bike mobility
- Pedestrian districts, pedestrian only streets
- Adequate road funding - toll roads – transit

Small Group 2:

- Use existing rail more
- Billboard-free highways
- Cell towers disguised as trees - make them fit into the environment
- Synchronize traffic lights
- Real-time traffic info - use gps systems to track and send information
- Freight tunnel

Small Group 3:

- Air quality
- Having no fines for polluting air, water
- Government more local and regional, where the problems are
- Focus on need, not just equalness
- More communication between ourselves and with leaders

Small Group 4:

- Government
- Walking paths
- Downtown culture
- Sense of community
- Retail variety with foot traffic

Small Group 5:

- Schools - always improve
- Transportation - mass transit, roads (have and kept up with growth), roundabouts
- Land use/zoning - density = quality development
- Community involvement
- Add parks and keep them up

**The Civic League Lineup**

As a final exercise, Jon asked participants to line up across the meeting room according to how hopeful they were that the Atlanta Region could achieve the things they had talked about that evening. On one wall, he posted a “1” and on the opposite wall, he posted a “10.” Those who were very pessimistic should line up near the 1, Jon said; those who were very optimistic should line up at the 10. Others should line up at a point reflecting a degree of optimism and pessimism. A majority lined up in the 7-10 part of the line.



**Snapshot of Participants**

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

<b>Gender</b>	
Male	58%
Female	43%

<b>Age</b>	
Under 18	0%
18-24	5%
25-44	25%
45-65	55%
Over 65	15%

<b>Race/Ethnic Group</b>	
Black or African American	30%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%
Hispanic/Latino	0%
White or Caucasian	68%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%
Other	0%

<b>Zip Code</b>	
Home: 30127*	50%
Surrounding**	8%
Other	43%

\* This is the ZIP code where the meeting was held  
 \*\* These are the ZIP codes adjoining 30127

**About the Civic League**

The Civic League for Regional Atlanta is an organization that builds the knowledge, involvement, voice and power of metro Atlanta's citizens. As part of the Civic League's work, it convenes Neighborhood Forums where citizens can listen to one another and offer their own ideas for improving the region. The Civic League gathers and documents the citizens' ideas and brings them to the attention of state, local and regional leaders.

In 2008 and 2009, we are working with the Atlanta Regional Commission on its Fifty Forward visioning initiative. Our role is to help bring the citizens' voice to this effort to plan how our region will look and work in the year 2058.

In the years ahead, we will host other kinds of citizen gatherings, including forums on pressing regional issues and overlooked problems. Our format for those meetings will be similar to the Neighborhood Forums: facilitated, open-ended discussions aimed at gathering the citizens' thoughts on important issues.