

OPINION

STEVE LABOVITZ AND MICHAEL PARIS

Transit legislation is a must for regional momentum

The Council for Quality Growth has continually supported our state legislature and local government delegations in addressing the metro Atlanta region's surface transportation and transit needs. Bold solutions to our region's mobility issues began with the passage of House Bill 170 during the 2015 Georgia legislative session - a resolute signal to the state and the metro Atlanta region that legislators and local governments were ready to begin chipping away at the region's transportation infrastructure problems. The leadership of the governor, both chambers of the Georgia General Assembly, and numerous local delegations to pass House Bill 170 culminated in an additional \$1 billion per year to the Georgia Department of Transportation for roadway maintenance, improvements and expansions.

Today, the results of that legislation are evident throughout the metro Atlanta region with the I-285/Georgia 400 improvement project, I-85 express lanes extension, and anywhere else you see concrete barriers, orange cones, and GDOT trucks. These efforts contributed to the safe and efficient movement of goods and people throughout Georgia and have greatly enhanced Georgia's transportation landscape.

Finding effective ways to move metro Atlantans around our region remains one of our most pressing issues. Following successful passage of Senate Bill 369, the overwhelming public support in 2016 (over 69 percent voter approval) for an additional half-penny sales tax in the city of Atlanta underscored the willingness of metro Atlanta's citizens to pay for transit expansion.

As metro Atlanta adds nearly 100,000 new residents each year and competes with global cities for world-class economic development expansions and relocations, many of these rival cities already have, or are actively investing in, robust public transit networks.

This 2018 legislative session, members of the General Assembly have once again had the opportunity to lead, with two transit governance and funding bills being considered in the legislature - Senate Bill 386 by Senator Brandon Beach and House Bill 930 by Representative Kevin Tanner. These two leaders have undertaken the



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difficult task of crafting legislation that changes the way we approach transit in the region and will unify our core 13 counties under a single transit governance and funding structure. We thank Chairman Tanner and Chairman Beach for their initiative.

Georgia history has proven that this state can coalesce around daring transportation initiatives, and the voters in the metro Atlanta region have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to pay more for robust transit services (see the ARC's "Metro Atlanta Speaks" survey). The Council for Quality Growth has consistently advocated for a unified transit framework in metro Atlanta, and we believe that the ability to accomplish this goal rests on the following five tenets:

Ensure a comprehensive regional transit system

A regional transit master plan must comprehensively unify and expand connectivity throughout all 13 metro Atlanta counties and their respective municipalities based on ridership and population ebb and flow patterns. Further, it must provide seamless connectivity between different modes of transportation and areas of service, including payment methods, transfers, project and route planning, and branding.

Create a governance structure that properly represents the commuting population

Regional transit system governance should consist of board members who understand the unique transit needs of the commuters that utilize our region's transportation corridors.

Preserve local funding decisions

The financial commitment required to implement robust transit in any one of the 13 metro Atlanta counties will vary by

population, density, city and county core areas, and incoming and outgoing daily commuters. Local government leaders are uniquely positioned to tailor the financial underwriting of transit in their counties and cities to the needs of their resident transit riders. Allowing up to a full-penny extends local governments the flexibility to align their residents' transit needs with their financial commitment.

Embrace flexibility of modes of transit

All transit modes should be available for consideration in a regional transit plan, including heavy rail, light rail, Bus Rapid Transit, and Arterial Rapid Transit. A regional transit system should also examine creative uses of our extensive managed lane system.

Capitalize on existing regional transit assets

MARTA has spent more than 60 years laying the groundwork for a regional transit plan in Metro Atlanta, and is now in the strongest financial shape that it has ever been in. Additionally, CobbLinc, Gwinnett Transit, GRTA, and others have spent decades investing in transit systems that connect the region. These existing transit services' cumulative ability to move over 145 million transit riders each year should be accentuated and capitalized upon.

These five tenets are currently embedded in both House Bill 930 and Senate Bill 386, and the Council urges Senate and House leadership and the General Assembly to preserve them and adopt a regional transit bill that will continue to propel the region forward.



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