

Atlanta Forward >>

What is Atlanta Forward?

Our region is an important part of a complex world. On these pages, we will bring you a wide array of viewpoints and insights on the issues you've told us are most important to you. We're committed to bringing you smart work by some of the best thinkers in metro Atlanta and beyond. We want to involve you in the conversation, too, so let us know what you think.

Today's moderator: Tom Sabulis

A 20-year veteran of the AJC, Tom Sabulis has covered news, politics and the arts during a career that has taken him to newspapers across the country. Since 2008, he has coordinated many of the newspaper's pro/con debates and first-person guest columns.

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TOPIC SCHEDULE

Monday	Schools
Tuesday	Transportation
Wednesday	Regional economy
Thursday	Leadership
Friday	Quality of life

TUESDAY CONVERSATION: TRANSPORTATION

GUEST COLUMN



Alex Mackenzie Torres is vice president of global product marketing at Moovit.

Free apps aid transit planning

By Alex Torres

Public transit: two words that evoke an array of feelings. There are those who hate it, those who love it, and those who do what they can to avoid it. Through the years, public transportation has improved and there are far more commuters than ever before. We now have the technology to better inform commuters, so transit riders have more certainty in travel if a delay or problem does arise.

Technology, such as mobile apps like MARTA On the Go, has set out to change the way commuters get around. Before having access to this information on smartphones, there was no easy way for transit riders to know why the bus was late (or how late it would be) until it arrived at the station.

Remember how much time it used to take to plan a trip? Having to deal with multiple route maps, complex timetables, and asking busy bus drivers for directions are a thing of the past. Technology has not only helped in simplifying the process but has taken the hassle out of it as well, making the public transit experience so much more enjoyable and dependable.

Now, with free apps like Moovit, all of this information is easily accessible. Let's say you want to catch a Braves game and aren't sure which rail line to get on. With the OmniSearch feature, you're able to not only see which line is closest to you, but what other transit options are available, and what the most direct route is. These apps can also notify you when it's time to get off the train, so if you're new to public transit, you don't have to worry about missing your stop.

Public transit often gets a bad rep for not being the cleanest or luxurious way to get around, and although there is no way for technology to completely change that, apps have been working on ways to improve the experience. For instance, Moovit provides you with notifications before your bus even arrives to let

A new speaker of the House is facing political pressures and gamesmanship – not a great time to tackle critical problems on a deadline, such as federal highway funding. It requires at least a short-term extension when a long-term fix is preferred by many. Today's lead column deals with the need to act quickly. Our other columns speak to the need to address the Clifton Corridor transportation improvements with a new SPLOST, and the benefit that real-time technology is bringing to planning public transit trips.

GUEST COLUMN

Investment vital to prosperity

By John Andreas

Atlanta commuters spend 52 hours annually sitting in traffic, wasting more than 57 million gallons of gas and costing drivers \$3.2 billion. The city is the 12th-worst in the nation for traffic delays, according to a recent study by the Texas A&M Institute. Statewide, Georgia travelers lose nearly \$4 billion per year from traffic delays.

Without better infrastructure, Georgia's traffic problems will only get worse. Valuable improvements to the roads, public transit and for pedestrians are on the drawing board. But these projects need more funding.

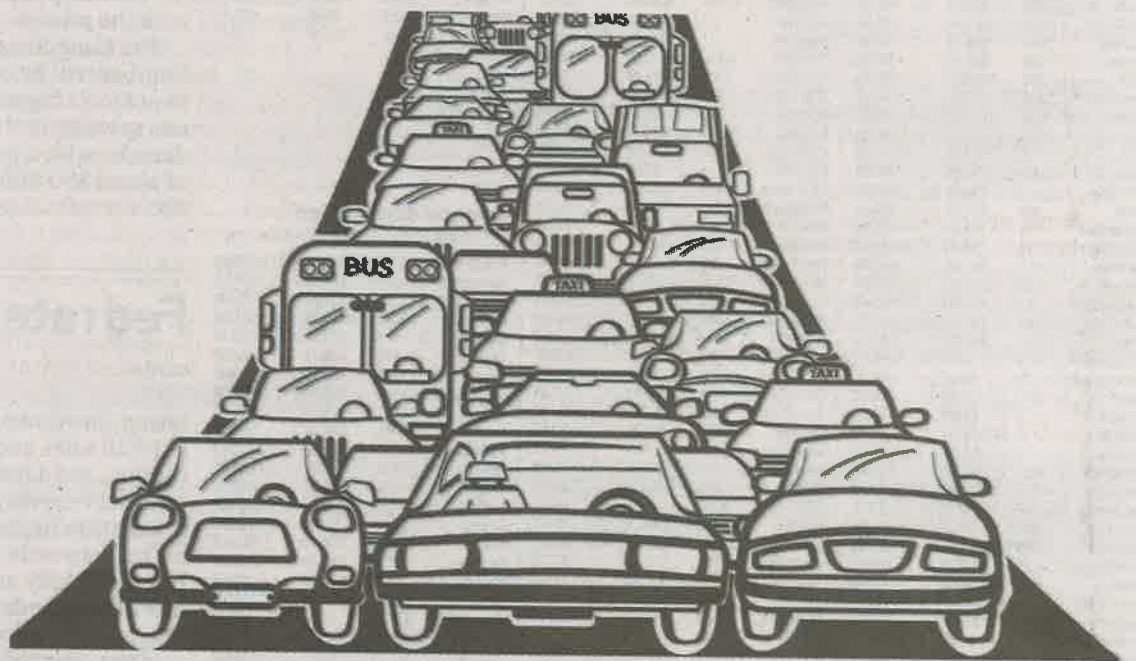
That's why Congress needs to pass a long-term Transportation Bill. Both the Senate and House have proposed legislation that would help provide long-term funding for much-needed transportation projects. But such legislation must be passed before Oct. 29, when federal transportation funding lapses.

Georgia's representatives, especially Rep. Rob Woodall, R-Lawrenceville, should act swiftly to pass long-term transportation funding – and finally start repairing Georgia's transportation system.

Many highway transportation projects in Georgia have already been stalled by Congress's failure to grant long-term funding for infrastructure development. These include a \$5 million extension of the express lane along I-85 in Gwinnett County and a \$5 million renovation of Atlanta's Perimeter between I-75 and I-85, one of the city's most congested areas.

Additionally, a \$20 million "connector" planned for Atlanta's Dunwoody suburb, designed to siphon cars off the streets and encourage the use of public transit at Dunwoody's MARTA station, will likely be shelved for years.

The public strongly supports improvements to public transportation, but such



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John Andreas is vice president of Vossloh Klepe.

projects are also underfunded. More than three-fifths of voters in Gwinnett County, for example, support extending MARTA into Gwinnett, and more than half favor expanded bus service. But the county still needs funding just to get its bus system back to pre-recession levels.

Georgia's congressional leaders need to understand the economic importance of Georgia's transportation infrastructure. For every \$1 billion invested in public transit, 24,000 jobs are created, 67 percent of which are green jobs. Every \$1 billion spent on public transportation leads to \$3.6 billion in sales to local businesses, which can generate \$500 million in taxes.

For example, my company Vossloh Klepe – a supplier of

electrical systems for public transit services – depends on public transportation for continued growth. Based here in Georgia, we've been able to increase our total employment nine-fold since 2010 thanks to growing demand for public transit.

Moreover, public transit saves money for everyday citizens. A two-car family can save nearly \$10,000 a year if it can dispense with the second vehicle and rely on public transit instead. When households are located in areas with access to excellent public transit systems, they spend less on transportation, according to recent report by the Center for Neighborhood Technology.

Meanwhile, public transportation saves on use of gasoline. Nationwide, public transit use saves 4.2 billion gallons of gas a year. It reduces U.S. carbon dioxide emissions by 37 million metric tons per year, a substantial reduction in our carbon footprint.

Mediocre investment has left projects for Georgia's pedestrians languishing as well. The "Pedestrian Pathways"

project for Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville would build new parking lots and link campus buildings with sidewalks and handicap ramps, but is underfunded. Badly needed safety improvements for pedestrians in downtown Atlanta – such as better lighting, upgraded crossing signals, new traffic islands and sidewalk repairs – also need additional funding.

Georgia desperately needs federal dollars to sustain its transportation system. The traffic problems plaguing Atlanta are seeping into surrounding counties and won't improve without serious investment in our transportation infrastructure – especially public transportation.

Good plans to address these issues are in place, but can't be implemented until long-term federal funding is guaranteed. Georgians need to tell their congressional representatives, including Rep. Woodall, to act quickly to pass a robust transportation bill – and finally create a market that encourages investment in our businesses and workforce.

GUEST COLUMN

Tax needed to improve Clifton Corridor

By Sam Massell