

Chapter 3

Community **Outreach**



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Community Outreach: Connect Atlanta's Public Involvement Process

The City of Atlanta began the transportation effort with a commitment that this plan would be community driven and technically sound. It is the City of Atlanta's philosophy that lasting transportation solutions for the City will emerge when people throughout the community are brought together in a spirit of cooperation. In order to assure that this would be the community's plan, great efforts were made to meet with, work with and communicate with as many citizens as possible in as many ways as possible. Our efforts have attracted and actively involved residents, employees, and local business interests from around the City.

This chapter describes the public outreach efforts undertaken in developing the Connect Atlanta Plan and summarizes the information and feedback that each component provided to the Connect Atlanta project team.

First, however, the chapter explains the broad scope of thinking that helped to generate the discussions that made up the public involvement process. The seven main goals of the Connect Atlanta Plan are intended to represent a diverse range of community concerns in looking into Atlanta's future. These goals were developed jointly by the City Council, the public advisory group and staff and formed the cornerstone for later assessment and evaluation of Connect Atlanta recommendations.

3.1 Project Goals

The Connect Atlanta Plan is a comprehensive plan for Atlanta's transportation, but as a framework for major public investments over the next 25 years it is important that it reflect a broad range of community values. Early in the public involvement process, the City developed seven fundamental project goals jointly with stakeholders and citizens. These are intended to express what the city needs from its transportation system in order to create choices, promote good health, prepare for expected growth, maintain fiscal and environmental sustainability and maintain quality places for all people. The seven project goals have been organized here under the umbrella of three strategic categories within which the needs for progress will be articulated.

Regional Strategies. As the largest jurisdiction and the focal point of the region, the City is a primary driver of the local, regional and even state economy. The project goals of providing balanced transportation choices and preparing for growth will certainly have to be accomplished within the context of Atlanta's larger leadership role. In terms of transportation, the interaction of the freeway system with the more urban city street network and the transit system will be of critical importance to both the City and the region.

Economic Development. City residents want to participate in a vibrant economy that provides jobs and opportunities for wealth creation for everyone. The study goals of preparing for growth and maintaining fiscal sustainability are clearly a part of creating a sound economic future. This will involve not only the movement of people, but the movement of goods. The future will also be increasingly characterized by a skilled labor force that will exercise choices in where they choose to live. Those communities that create desirable places with diverse choices for all citizens will have an advantage in such an economy.

Neighborhood Enhancement and Preservation. Ask most any resident what makes Atlanta special and the conversation will quickly turn to the people and the neighborhoods that make up the city. The project goals of promoting health and safety, creating environmental sustainability and preserving neighborhoods recognize the value of these assets.

In addition to the City's general goals for growth, the Connect Atlanta Plan is driven by objectives that tie into a livable, sustainable, publicly appealing

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transportation system. These were the bases for discussion at public outreach activities and have helped to identify key issues facing the City as it continued through plan development. The seven goals described here were discussed more thoroughly at the November 2007 joint meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee and Stakeholder Committee, and a summary of those responses follows in the portion of this chapter that describes the involvement of these two committees.

Goal 1: Provide Balanced Transportation Choices

The concept of balanced transportation choices refers to a system that provides multiple modes of travel and allows practical, safe and convenient use of the mode that best fits the nature of the trip. Currently automobiles are the predominant travel mode in Atlanta and a large portion of the city's transportation infrastructure has been calibrated around them; however, even this mode is often beholden to a single route option due to a lack of connectivity or route redundancy. Reflecting the need for viable transit options, creating safe and well maintained pedestrian and bicycle connections, and providing vehicular route options via a strong network of streets will allow us to flexibly accommodate travel and growth according to the parameters and needs of residents and the market.

Goal 2: Promote Public Health and Safety

There is a growing recognition in policy circles that many public investments in seemingly unrelated areas have impacts on one another. Julie Gerberding, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recently encouraged community leaders to consider public health in every investment that is made, including those which allow more active lifestyles such as “sidewalks, bike lanes, parks and recreation.” Likewise, physical safety for all users of the transportation system—especially bicycles and pedestrians— can be improved through consideration of designs that encourage appropriate vehicle speeds, land uses that keep more eyes on the streets at all hours and proper lighting.

Goal 3: Prepare for Growth

It is beyond question that growth has been happening in the Atlanta region: metropolitan Atlanta added over one million residents in the 1990s and population estimates suggest that by the end of the 2000s²⁴ it will have grown by an even greater number. Additionally, after nearly a quarter-century of population decline, Atlanta proper is growing as well. The core city, by virtue of its urban form, is an area well-suited to accommodate much of the expected regional growth. Population estimates since 2000 show Atlanta nearing a record population within its city limits, though this geographic area has remained largely unchanged for 50 years. This points to a need to understand the implications of more intense land uses and how they can be accommodated by public infrastructure, especially transportation.

Goal 4: Maintain Fiscal Sustainability

Fiscal sustainability is more than the ability to fund new public works projects, or even to continue paying for their maintenance. It is also understanding the value that projects create for their community and how projects can be prioritized and developed on the basis of maximizing this value. For example, project A may initially cost more than project B, but project B may have lower long-term maintenance costs, a longer replacement cycle and create an environment for land uses which create a higher taxable revenue stream. Unless one understands this full financial picture, sound long-term decisions will be difficult to make.

Goal 5: Strive for Environmental Sustainability

As mentioned previously, Atlanta's transportation system occupies nearly one-third of its land area (through public street and private rail rights-of-way). This portion of Atlanta should be accountable for environmental impacts just as much as the rest of the city. Transportation decisions impact water quality, air quality, fossil fuel consumption and green space in direct and indirect ways. Unless we seek to consider these external impacts, our decisions will only partially account for the economic and social consequences of our actions.

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Goal 6: Preserve Neighborhoods

Though a more comprehensive, balanced transportation plan offers greater ability to handle future growth, some areas are not as immediately prepared to undergo change or have well established character and community patterns that could be disrupted by adding more intense development or large-scale public works projects. Such neighborhoods are one of the City's most valuable assets and need to be identified and protected.

Goal 7: Create Desirable Places for All

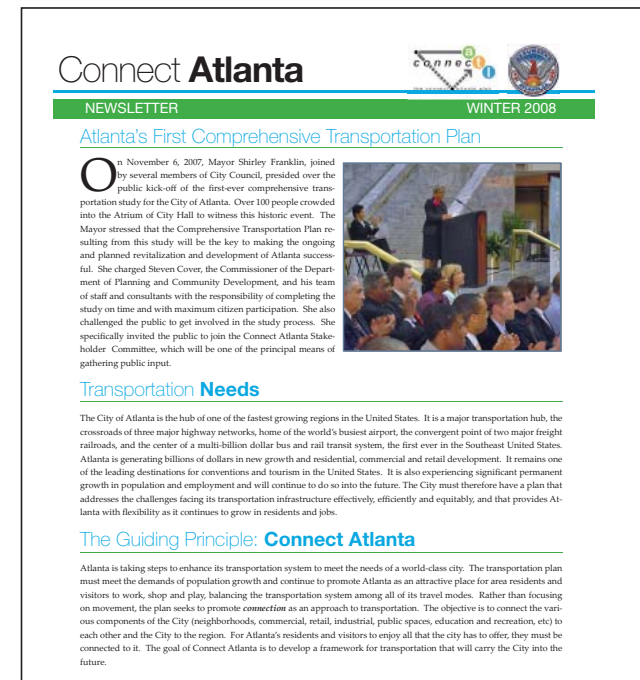
Ultimately, we want to see Atlanta as a place where people want to live and visit. In addition to a higher quality of life and related external benefits for the City, such as higher property values and tax revenue, neighborhood stability, and public image, Atlanta also stands to enrich its status as a convention and visitors' city. This can be accomplished by creating attractive, desirable neighborhoods, retail and business districts, and public places.

3.2 Communication and Gathering Information: One-on-One Interviews and Focus Groups

Early in the study process, the team initiated a series of detailed discussions with key stakeholders (property owners, advocates, neighborhood leadership, business leaders, etc.) to find out what issues and needs were important to them and to gain perspective on ideas for moving forward.

This effort helped the team to recognize priorities in the use of limited public transportation dollars. Among the topics discussed in the interviews were the person's transportation priorities, concerns about growth, funding, the degree to which private sector investments can be leveraged to accomplish public goals and the City's proper role in transportation. We found that in these interviews many pressing issues for the community emerged. Some of the common themes from the interviews included:

- Transportation is a high priority for the City.
- Projects identified by the plan should be completed
- Sidewalks in the City are inadequate
- Realistic funding should be identified
- Smart growth that respects neighborhoods



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3.3 Website and Online Survey

The project website (www.connectatlanbtaplan.com) was one avenue to the Team used to ensure that up-to-date information was readily available throughout the study. Public presentations, newsletters, technical evaluation documents were all made available in this forum. Among the documents posted to the website for review were:

- All public presentations
- Technical memoranda
- List of proposed projects and prioritization
- Citywide Map Book of projects
- Draft Street Design Guideline

The Team conducted a survey of residents and business operators to gain some perspective on initial thoughts and opinions about a variety of issues. The survey was offered online and was supplemented by hard copy survey forms targeted to communities which had exhibited lower response rates to the online surveys. Some eye opening conclusions can be ascertained from the survey.

For example, only about 10 percent of the respondents believe the City's transportation system is good or excellent. This suggests a strong need for improvement. In response to another question, about half of respondents felt that congestion relief, which has been articulated as the region's top priority, was the City's top transportation priority. However, over 80 percent of respondents felt that rail transit was a top priority for the City. This begins to suggest that the City's priorities may not be exactly the same as the region's or the State's.

Quarterly Newsletter

A quarterly newsletter was developed to provide information on project process and results. It was hoped that this material would be particularly useful to people who could not attend individual meetings or who had joined the process late.

3.4 Technical & Stakeholder Committee Process and Meetings

Two committees were formed to help provide guidance to the team throughout the process. The first was a Technical Advisory Committee. This committee was a group of invited individuals consisting primarily of partner agency staff, business community representatives and non-profit transportation advocacy groups. The second was a Stakeholder Advisory Committee. The City took the unique step of making membership on this committee available to the public at large through an application form available on the website and at outreach events. These Stakeholder Committee members differed from the general public in that they were expected to stay with the process throughout, and they were asked to provide guidance related to specific and detailed project issues. A number of unique and focused activities were undertaken with this stakeholder group.

Advisory Committees' Role in Refining Goals

One of the first discussions with the Stakeholder and Technical Advisory Committees focused on the project goals described in Section 3.1. These were still conceptual and the input of the Advisory Committees was highly important in refining these goals and considering the ways the Connect Atlanta Plan might achieve them.

Goal 1: Discussions included the need for transportation choices to be attractive, convenient, efficient and affordable; the need to recognize that market segments are different and that no one size fits all; the need for safer highway exits; and the need to modify personal travel behavior.

Goal 3: Participants expressed that preparing for growth includes planning for all transportation modes, encouragement of growth in specific areas, expenditure of transportation dollars in areas where growth is desired, and the overall integration of land use and transportation.

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Goal 4: The committees identified the following as major elements of fiscal sustainability:

- Organize projects
- Communicate the plan/projects
- Represent the plan to both major and minor political entities
- Solicit funds from unique sources
- Create innovative funding solutions and make Atlanta a new model
- Focus on broad community value of projects (incorporating such factors as time, personal health, community health and environment); develop a new metric system for project performance
- Consider life spans of transit modes
- Utilize existing infrastructure
- Partner public and private entities in sharing infrastructure

Goal 5: Committee members pointed out that transportation decisions not only create potential direct impacts on such natural resources as streams and open space, but they also relate to broader concepts such as carbon footprint. Participants expressed a desire to see transportation planning decisions actively seeking to reduce these impacts through better modes of transportation, conservation of resources, and better management of storm water.

Goal 6: Important points emphasized were definition and preservation of neighborhoods, the use of code enforcement, enhanced access in and out of neighborhoods for people needing to reach those neighborhoods, and the benefits of careful application of mixed land uses to support neighborhood stability and movement.

Goal 7: Participants in the workshop pointed out that desirable places have much to do with transportation decisions, reflected in such details as how easily streets can be walked and crossed, how safe residents feel from fast-moving vehicle traffic in neighborhoods, and how easily one can reach other parts of the city, especially in the connection between neighborhoods and employment.

Later discussions with stakeholders focused on a series of targeted discussions on topics of import to the plan. A summary of these topic sessions follows:

Discussion Topic 1: Transit

- MARTA reliability is an issue
- Better bus stops
- Provide dedicated lanes for buses and trolley services
- Provide more frequent service - shorter headways during non-peak hours
- Need to provide internal connections (east-west not just north-south), potentially through intown circulators
- Feeder systems for neighborhoods
- Address safety through design: better sight lines, lighting at stations
- Provide higher densities around stations
- System needs to be subsidized by the state
- Connectivity of the last mile

Discussion Topic 2: Intersections and Hot Spots

- Consider roundabouts versus traffic lights
- Williams Street exit is difficult
- Metropolitan and Cleveland
- No ADA enhancements – no sign for visual and hearing impaired
- Moreland, westbound exit – no traffic light for southbound traffic
- I-85 and GA 400 merge – traffic stops because merge lanes are too short
- GA 400, I-85 and I-75 – merge lanes are too short and need lengthen
- Buckhead – Piedmont, Roswell and Habersham
- Monroe and 10th Street – difficult for pedestrians; there is crossing only on one side

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- Too many one-way streets; consider changing to increase traffic flow particularly Spring, West Peachtree and Williams streets
- Briarcliff, Ponce de Leon and Moreland
- Piedmont Park and 14th Street – pedestrian access is limited and need improvement
- Buckhead Loop and Piedmont Road – need to be more pedestrian friendly

Discussion Topic 3: Freight/Trucking

- Identify where freight is coming from and going to
- Can freight just passing through be more effectively re-routed around Atlanta
- Can we negotiate with railroads for more quiet zones, and a lot more visual screening
- Charge trucks for passing through
- Multi-task rail capacity. Freight tracks can move commuters too
- Railroads are a part of our heritage
- Land use and context should trump truck needs
- Make smaller trucks do the delivering in the city (some for, others against)
- Don't allow GDOT to classify roads
- Just because a piece of land is currently zoned “industrial” doesn't mean that it is appropriate for it to remain industrial

Discussion Topic 4: Sidewalks/Walking

- 100 % City sidewalk coverage is a good thing
- Sidewalks on both sides of the street should be focused on demand or at least along major streets in major neighborhoods
- Focus should be placed on maintenance of the sidewalk system for an aging population
- Priority for sidewalks should promote consistency and continuity in the system
- Priority areas should be around bus stops and stations, schools, churches, public facilities, employment centers, mixed use areas, etc
- Attention should be placed on curb cuts and ADA accessibility
- Consider mid-block pedestrian crossings
- Grass buffers should be required



A closing presentation at one of the four design workshops.

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3.5 Visioning Meetings

It is essential to know the community's values in order to effectively narrow the field of alternative solutions. The creation of a culture of transportation investment that relies upon more than vehicular mobility requires the development and articulation of performance criteria that relate to larger community goals. No transportation model ever developed a vision. The vision comes from the community and, the goal of the visioning effort was to be sure that transportation recommendations will flow from and be supportive of the community's larger values and goals, rather than the outputs of models or analyses.

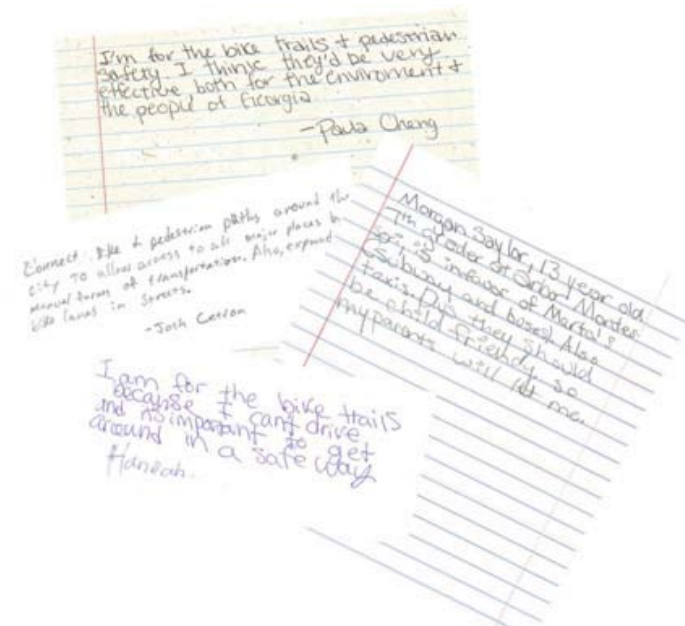
Following some of the initial technical activities the Team initiated a first round of public kickoff work sessions in each of seven Public Outreach Districts. These interactive public work sessions were focused on identifying the goals, values, strengths and challenges in Atlanta. The team promoted a discussion regarding how these issues can inform and direct the development of an evaluation framework.

Existing conditions were presented and examples from other communities were discussed for reference. We believe it is critical that the evaluation framework developed at these sessions leave as much flexibility as possible in the selection of projects that individual communities can support.

3.6 Concept and Design Workshops

These public workshops were the centerpiece of the development of the transportation plan. The Team conducted four week-long public design workshops located in and organized on key geographic areas and issues. These workshops were multi-disciplinary, working design sessions where stakeholders, designers, technical experts, and the public worked together to develop design and planning solutions. We conducted the workshops at four easily accessible locations:

- Georgia-Pacific Center
- Adamsville Recreation Center
- Atlanta Metropolitan College
- City Hall East



Students from a middle school participated in the first of the four design workshops and sent thoughts and comments on the plan effort.

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These were, effectively, temporary offices or “design studios” which gave our technical experts an opportunity to create a multi-disciplinary working environment focused on identifying, testing and designing projects over a two month period. The working studios were open to the public, and each one was focused around three major public events:

- 1. The workshop kick-off and design session.** At the workshop kickoff event, we presented the results of the initial visioning sessions, data collection, analysis activities and stakeholder interviews in an organized evening public kick-off event, as well as, facilitate an interactive discussion.
- 2. A Design Open-House.** Held over multiple days, the team worked on-site to develop and test various design and planning ideas. This work focused on developing specific transportation solutions for; areas of change and redevelopment, expanding multi-modal choice, developing street typology and complete streets, protecting areas of no change, expanding connectivity and selectively expanding vehicle capacity. Interested stakeholders and the public were encouraged and welcome to work with project designers in this open house format all day from 10 am to 8 pm.
- 3. A Closing Presentation of the Workshop’s Results.** The work produced during the workshop was presented the evening of the final day in a formal public presentation allowing for comment and feedback on the preliminary designs.

3.7 Public Outreach District Prioritization Work Sessions

Following analyses of the projects identified during the workshops, the technical work was brought back to the seven Public Outreach Districts in an evening work session format. These work sessions, held in each Public Outreach District, were focused on the performance of various project alternatives versus the community goals identified in the visioning meetings. In addition, they gave the public an opportunity to see the direction the study was taking and provide feedback before the development of the preliminary recommendations of the Comprehensive Transportation Plan. The team was able to document feedback received from the Stakeholder Committee, Technical Committee, staff and Council.

3.8 Plan Adoption & Open Houses

The final public events were a series of four open houses for the public to review the Transportation Plan’s findings, analysis, recommendations, and to provide input. These public meetings were held in anticipation of the adoption of the plan.

3.9 City Council Work Sessions

The Team held two work sessions with City Council to keep them informed of progress and to gain insight into direction of the study. A third workshop was scheduled for November 2008. We believe it is important that all key decision makers contribute to and buy into the study direction and processes at various stages in order to avoid the need for backtracking later. These work sessions were very successful and assured that Council would not be surprised by plan elements that they will be asked to act upon.

3.10 Additional Community Outreach

Members of the Team participated in scheduled meetings of community groups and organizations as well as special events to provide information about the study and especially to promote attendance at scheduled public meetings.

- Public/Press Kickoff Event
- Council for Quality Growth
- Atlanta Bicycle Campaign Workshop
- Urban Land Institute Smart Growth Committee
- Grant Park Neighbors
- Piedmont Heights Neighborhood
- Peachtree Hills Neighbors
- North Buckhead Neighborhoods
- Livable Communities Coalition
- Citizens for Progressive Transit
- NPU “C” Representatives
- Buckhead CID
- Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce

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- City Council Transportation Committee
- NPU-T Representatives
- NPU-O Chair
- NPU-F Chair
- Central Atlanta Progress Town Hall Meeting

Additional Coordination Meetings

- Atlanta Regional Commission Freight Group
- City Economic Development Subcabinet
- Atlanta Beltline Subcabinet
- City Transportation Subcabinet
- Atlanta Emergency Services
- Bureau of Buildings
- Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport
- Fulton County Staff
- DeKalb County Staff
- Clayton County Staff
- Cities of East Point and Hapeville
- Press Kickoff Event
- North Buckhead Neighborhood
- Council for Quality Growth
- Livable Communities Coalition
- Atlanta Planning and Advisory Board
- Atlanta Bicycle Campaign
- Citizens for Progressive Transit
- Urban Land Institute
- NPU C Representatives
- NPU F Representatives
- Grant Park Neighborhood
- Buckhead CID
- Piedmont Heights Neighborhood
- Perkerson Park Representatives
- Central Atlanta Progress
- Peachtree Hills Neighborhood
- Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce
- Castleberry Hill Neighborhood
- Atlanta Regional Commission Freight Task Force
- Watershed Department
- City Economic Development Sub-Cabinet
- Bureau of Housing
- City Transportation Sub-Cabinet
- Atlanta Public Schools
- Fulton County
- City Beltline Sub-Cabinet
- Department of Public Works Atlanta
- Regional Commission Staff
- ARC's Technical Coordinating Committee
- Cobb County CID
- Sandy Springs Staff Cobb County Staff
- Cobb County Chamber of Commerce
- Latin American Association
- Korean Association
- Georgia World Congress Center
- Institute of Transportation Engineers
- Georgia Planning Association
- GDOT's TIME Task Force
- Georgia Regional Transportation Authority
- Shepherd Center
- Morningside-Lenox Park
- Woodland Hills Neighborhood
- Lindridge Martin Manor
- Lavista Park
- Chastain Park Representatives
- Lenox mall shoppers
- Greenbriar Mall shoppers
- Kroger Citi-Center shoppers
- NPU A representatives
- NPU B representatives