

# Opportunity Deferred: Race, Transportation, and the Future of Metropolitan Atlanta





Every day in metropolitan Atlanta, residents face traffic gridlock that's often ranked among the worst in the nation. For some, this daily ritual is a minor inconvenience endured in the relative safety and comfort of their climate-controlled cars. But for residents with limited resources and inadequate transportation options, commuting to work, school and other destinations represents a major roadblock to improving the quality of life for themselves and for their loved ones.

While their transportation experiences may be dramatically different, both groups share more in common than many realize. The contemporary challenges we face – as individuals and as a community – have been undeniably shaped by a history of structural racism and divisive policy decisions that have hindered our collective potential to thrive in an ever-changing economy. In order to achieve more successful transportation outcomes for all sectors of our society, acknowledging our troubling past is an important first step. Going forward, we must courageously commit to making more equitable transportation and land use decisions now, and in the future.

The unsuccessful 2102 referendum that was intended to create a truly regional transportation network for metro Atlanta offers a powerful reminder of how much the forces of racial inequity, unchecked sprawl, and de facto segregation still plague us today. The vote conjured historic comparisons to the tortured efforts 40 years earlier to win local approval for creation of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). In both instances, the pernicious legacy of policies deeply rooted in race and class effectively deprived the region of access to funding for much-needed transportation infrastructure. It's noteworthy that voters in Clayton County overwhelmingly rejected funding for MARTA in 1971 when the county was predominantly White and affluent. By 2014, when the county's racial and economic demographics had flipped, a subsequent vote to join the MARTA system passed by a resounding 3-to-1 margin.

Our willingness to learn from our mistakes in transportation and land-use policies will assist us greatly in leveraging the opportunities inherent in Metro Atlanta's fast-changing demographics. The reality is that when many of the entry-level jobs in our region are located in areas with little to no public transit access, would-be employers and employees suffer.

When 90 percent of metro Atlanta's major job centers are found north of interstate highway I-20, households located south of I-20, as well as our regional economy, also suffer.

And, as more cars sit in traffic due to the lack of accessible and affordable transportation options, our carbon footprint expands and everyone – especially children and seniors – needlessly suffer from breathing polluted air.

In the wake of the successful Clayton County referendum to join MARTA in 2014, voters in the City of Atlanta enthusiastically supported a half-penny sales tax two years later as a down-payment on a wide range of MARTA expansion projects. Atlanta voters also passed a separate ballot measure to upgrade city roads, install bike paths and create more pedestrian-friendly streetscapes. This encouraging abundance of new opportunities must now be informed by a clear reckoning of how past transportation infrastructure decisions systematically disrupted and displaced working-class residents and communities of color.

To achieve those aims, Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) is calling on leaders from metro Atlanta's public and private sectors to embrace an innovative funding strategy that both expands transportation options while minimizing displacement. Development of the BeltLine's light-rail corridor on the west and south sides of the City runs the risk of impacting vulnerable households in much the same way that highway construction erased parts of Auburn Avenue – Atlanta's most renowned economic corridor for African-Americans – and also displaced a number of thriving black neighborhoods on the City's southside. We can do better, and we must.

PSE offers "Opportunity Deferred" as a constructive platform and framework for future efforts toward a more inclusive, sustainable and competitive region. As a regional community, we must be willing to learn from our mistakes in order to realize a brighter future. We will only be able to achieve this goal when all people and their communities are well-positioned to reach their highest purpose.

Nathaniel Smith  
Founder and CEO



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# Executive Summary



The Atlanta metropolitan region today faces a choice between regional prosperity and health shared by all residents or a continued legacy of racial disparities and inequity where prosperity is enjoyed by a select few. Opportunities are abundant. Interest in intown neighborhoods is surging. The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) recently expanded for the first time in four decades. The Atlanta BeltLine is moving forward, promising to make walking and bicycling real options in this sprawling, car-dependent metropolis.

These changes have the potential to improve our quality of life. But stark differences in wealth and racial demographics are still evident across the metro. The region's northern areas have tended to gain jobs and affluence and have remained mostly white, while the region's southern areas have been largely bypassed by economic opportunities and have become mostly Black. Gentrification and displacement, combined with decreasing affordable housing stocks are pushing people of color and low-income out of the City of Atlanta and into far-flung exurbs.



These differences have very real effects on the lives of the Atlanta metropolitan region's residents. The separation of economic opportunities means that workers face long, cross-regional commutes and crippling congestion. Transportation has repeatedly topped the list of the "biggest problems" facing the region, which currently fails to meet federal air pollution standards for ozone and fine particulates. Income inequality and racial segregation in our metropolitan area are some of the worst in the nation.

Opportunity Deferred describes how this situation came to be and what we can do about it. It documents decades of transportation and housing policies at the federal, state, and local levels that divided neighborhoods with vast freeways while supporting residential segregation.



To make the most of the region's profound opportunity to correct this failed legacy, we need to take a look back at the past to understand how specific policies and racial fears combined to create today's metropolitan Atlanta. We can either choose to address this legacy by charting a course that leads with racial equity, or we will ensure that the positive changes happening in our region will bypass people of color and low-income people.



The past demonstrates how federal housing and transportation policies enacted following World War II ensured that the benefits of public investments would generally be denied to Black families who were unable to build wealth through homeownership and whose neighborhoods were devastated by highway construction and urban renewal programs. Land use and transportation plans created during this time in Atlanta envisioned clearing out Black areas near the central business district and creating a transportation system that would whisk white suburban residents to their jobs downtown. Later plans for a truly regional rapid transit system were opposed by these newly suburban families. For the majority of its life, the MARTA system included only two counties that touch the City of Atlanta rather than the five core counties included in its original plans.

Despite these challenges, recent progress has been notable. Residents of Clayton County voted to tax themselves to finance the first MARTA expansion in over four decades. Underused parking at MARTA stations is being converted into mixed-use developments that will allow residents to walk, bike, and take transit more easily. The Atlanta BeltLine is creating a new wave of interest and investment in the densest intown neighborhoods. In 2016, Atlanta voters overwhelmingly passed a sales tax referendum that will raise about \$2.5 billion for local transit improvements. If approved by voters, new tax measures will finance the next generation of public transit and pedestrian/cyclist infrastructure.

But without efforts to elevate equity and race into policies across the board, gains in one area may be undermined by losses elsewhere as people of color are displaced from newly prosperous areas and housing prices in areas well-served by transit continue to rise.

This report includes specific policy and planning recommendations as well as examples from across the country that demonstrate how equity can best be incorporated into decision making throughout city, county, and regional governments.

These examples demonstrate the regional benefits that accrue from leading with equity. In the San Francisco Bay Area, equity advocates developed a regional transportation and land use vision focused on growing transit service and affordable housing and showed that social equity and environmental sustainability can go hand in hand. Officials in King County, Washington adopted a robust and widely successful equity agenda that has been underway for a decade. And, in Minnesota's Twin Cities, a federally funded "Corridors of Opportunity" program sought to bring the benefits of transit-oriented development to traditionally underserved populations.

The history, lessons learned, and promising examples included in Opportunity Deferred will benefit:

- Residents and elected officials who seek to learn about the history of the region and the key factors that shaped its growth, change, and current conditions;
- Transportation planners and decision makers to identify policies and practices that have shown promise in other regions across the country for achieving an equitable transportation system;
- Advocates and activists to help make the case for investments in public transit, affordable housing, and economic development that undo the region's legacy of racial disparity.



This report includes specific policy and planning recommendations as well as examples from across the country that demonstrate how equity can best be incorporated into decision-making throughout city, county, and regional governments.



# Opportunity Deferred

## Definitions

**Racism** is not solely personal or group prejudice or individual racist acts; it involves a legacy of decision-making and bias that has resulted in systematically poor outcomes for people of color. This report employs a structural definition of racism that considers the social, economic, and political forces and policies that operate to foster disparate outcomes across racial groups. The displacement of tens of thousands of Blacks from near-downtown Atlanta neighborhoods under the guise of urban renewal and slum clearance during the 1950s is one example of this type of racism.

**Equality and equity** are two separate concepts. Equality means that outcomes are identical for all people, without regard to individual differences or needs. Equity embodies more explicit concepts of fairness and allows for differences aimed at overcoming disadvantage. A simple example is the system of progressive taxation in the United States. Greater income is associated with a higher percentage taxation. This system is equitable, but it is not equal.

**Racial equity** means that all people, regardless of their race or ethnicity, are able to access the benefits and institutions of society and to participate fully in the activities that underlie a meaningful life. These benefits include quality health care and education, safe and affordable neighborhoods, viable employment, the right to vote, and the right to be free from discrimination, hate and harassment.

**Transportation equity** is a policy and planning goal that seeks to provide affordable, convenient options for individuals and families to reach important destinations. Equitable transportation plans and projects are aimed at closing gaps in the ability of different groups to access opportunities—public transit users and drivers, low- and high-income families, and people of color and white people.

## Overview: Opportunity Deferred

Transportation systems play a vital role in supporting metropolitan Atlanta's livability and economic competitiveness. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Interstates 75, 85, 20, and 285, local streets, bicycle lanes, the BeltLine, and regional public transit networks link people to opportunities. But today's transportation system is not functioning well for the 10-county region's four million residents. Air quality and congestion are ongoing concerns, driven by sprawling development patterns. People of color concentrated in the region's southern and western counties are increasingly disconnected from economic opportunities that continue to move northward. And while the regional rapid transit system recently expanded for the first time since its founding, its continued growth is threatened by lingering racial fears.

Opportunities to address these issues head-on have been deferred in the past, but the region can no longer afford to delay. As key supporters of realistic and long-term solutions for the South's economy, Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE) is taking a look at the region's history to clarify the specific factors that led to the transportation system and land use patterns we have today and to chart a path forward. This report is guided by the idea that equitable forward progress depends critically upon a genuine recognition and acknowledgment of the past. This historical perspective makes it clear that the entire region suffers when racism infects decision-making either intentionally or as a result of continuing status quo policies or decisions enacted decades ago. Air quality, daily commute times, and economic competitiveness all suffer when parts of the region are disconnected from opportunity.

Atlanta today is a product of its history – its people, decision makers, institutions, and choices. In order to remain competitive, the region must ensure that all communities have access to the jobs, social connections, parks, education, healthcare, and necessary resources to support a meaningful and fulfilling life. In order to leverage the opportunities rooted in the demographic, economic and spatial shifts occurring in our region, we must address the burden of structural racism and its effect on growth and governance. **This report documents how race has shaped Atlanta's transportation infrastructure, policy, and planning, and how racial motivations continue to underlie some of today's key decisions. The report describes these problems and discusses planning strategies that can be pursued in order to change this reality with the goal of placing the Atlanta metropolitan region in a highly competitive position for the future.**



## Common Origins: Civil Rights and Transportation Equity

The struggle for racial justice in the United States reached a high point during the civil rights movement. Although that movement culminated in the passage of key pieces of legislation, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act, nonviolent direct action undertaken by everyday citizens created the conditions necessary for change. Segregated public buses were an early flashpoint of conflict and resistance, as Black Americans in the south stood up against the injustice of the prevailing “separate but equal” doctrine in public facilities.

Specifically, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a defining moment of the civil rights era. In early December 1955, following the arrest of Rosa Parks for failing to give up her seat to a white bus passenger, members of the Women’s Political Council called for a boycott of Montgomery, Alabama’s bus system. Realizing quickly that a protracted boycott (and alternative transportation) would be necessary to enact the social change they sought, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was formed on December 5, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was elected its chair. That same day, King delivered a speech at the Holt Street Baptist Church where he made the moral claim for the boycott, laid the foundations for his philosophy of nonviolent resistance, and provided logistical guidance and suggestions for automobile owners to support Montgomery’s Black residents.

The boycott continued as the MIA, along with supporting organizations, challenged the constitutionality of bus segregation with a federal lawsuit. In November 1956, The U.S. Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Gayle v. Browder* upholding the decision of the lower court that segregated bus systems violated the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Following a court order to desegregate, the protest ended on December 20, 1956, but boycott leaders and bus riders still faced violence in the months that followed. Dr. King knew that the legal successes won as a result of the boycott would need to be reinforced with subsequent efforts.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was founded in Atlanta in 1957 to continue the work begun in Montgomery by ending segregation in all public facilities, not just buses. The SCLC was instrumental in achieving key civil rights gains won through nonviolent direct action, culminating in the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the Fair Housing Act, among others.



*“My friends, I want it to be known that we’re going to work with grim and bold determination to gain justice on the buses in this city.” – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the first mass meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association on December 5, 1955.*

*..Atlanta's past racial inequities are still deeply embedded in the region's infrastructure, built environment, and neighborhood demographics. Unfortunately, if Atlanta's inequitable growth patterns are not addressed, this historical problem will continue to reproduce disparities, keeping residents and the region as a whole from reaching their full potential.*

As the economy continues to recover from the Great Recession, it is critical that no segment of our region is left behind. Research on the link between economic competitiveness and social equity has shown that more equitable regions – those that foster genuine cooperation and the generation of knowledge and shared understanding – are more likely to sustain growth<sup>1</sup>. As we describe in this report, Atlanta's past racial inequities are still deeply embedded in the region's infrastructure, built environment, and neighborhood demographics.

Unfortunately, if Atlanta's inequitable growth patterns are not addressed, this historical problem will continue to reproduce disparities, keeping residents and the region as a whole from reaching their full potential. The challenge is vast. Funding for transportation investments is increasingly difficult to raise, competition for scarce dollars is fierce, and projects are often selected based on political calculations rather than legitimate transportation planning or equity concerns. The region continues to top a number of undesirable lists for quality-of-life issues. But these questions present an opportunity for the region to respond with transportation and land use planning decisions that represent a lasting investment in the region's economic prosperity, health, and well-being. In short, to ensure that metropolitan Atlanta continues to emerge from the recovery as strong as possible, we must seize the opportunity to ensure that prosperity is shared across the population by investing in transportation infrastructure and land use development that works for all of the groups that make up the region.

This report is structured in three parts. The first traces the history of 20th century Atlanta to describe the laws, policies, practices, and projects that created the contemporary region. These were not all local initiatives; both the state and federal governments had roles to play, from federally sanctioned lending discrimination in the 1950s to state compromises around rapid transit funding in the 1970s. The second section discusses the current transportation and land use planning arrangements and the challenges that the region is confronting, along with potential solutions. In the final section, the report details several promising examples of progressive and equitable transportation planning efforts – one from the Atlanta region and two from elsewhere – whose key features can be emulated to move towards equity.

## History of Transportation and Land Use Policy in Atlanta

Transportation and urban growth decisions made throughout the 20th century continue to have tremendous implications for the Atlanta metropolitan region<sup>2</sup>. These decisions have shaped today's widespread levels of residential segregation. In large measure, they also explain the region's lack of transit accessibility and why some communities were deemed favorable for sustainable economic investment – and others were not. The main catalysts were federal policies that encouraged suburban sprawl and destroyed urban neighborhoods; impacts then compounded by consistently imbalanced planning and land use policies at the local level.

At beginning of the 20th century, Atlanta was residentially and commercially segregated. The Black population, which made up 40% of the city in 1900, was concentrated in certain areas around Black schools and churches, usually on land that was deemed undesirable by whites. Black workers were restricted to lowly, unskilled positions within white companies, when they were allowed to work at all. The starkly segregated society and inequality of opportunity led to the creation of a separate civic and business society forged from within the Black community.<sup>3</sup> By catering to customers and employees who were not welcome in white society, Black-owned businesses like Atlanta Life Insurance and Citizens Trust Company thrived, along with a healthy middle class and strong civic leadership.<sup>4</sup> Atlanta's Black community was centered in "Sweet Auburn," a district just east of downtown with many vibrant businesses and an important entertainment scene.

However, the Black community still suffered as it was subordinate to the largely white elites who controlled city government and most of the regional economy. All Blacks were restricted geographically and most were confined to unskilled manual labor or domestic work. As the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. commented, "Negroes who considered themselves well off in terms of social station or economic security had only to go into downtown Atlanta to discover again just how little those things meant in a racist environment."<sup>5</sup>

By the 1930s, federal housing and transportation policies were underway that would ensure Black urban communities across the U.S., like Sweet Auburn in Atlanta, would be largely shut out of the prosperity that spawned the postwar suburbs.

<sup>1</sup> Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor, *Just Growth: Inclusion and Prosperity in America's Metropolitan Regions* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> On Atlanta, see Ronald H. Bayor, "Roads to Racial Segregation: Atlanta in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Urban History* 15, no. 1 (1988); *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Similar findings have been described for other US cities. See Aaron Golub, Richard A. Marcantonio, and Thomas W. Sanchez, "Race, Space, and Struggles for Mobility: Transportation Impacts on African Americans in Oakland and the East Bay," *Urban Geography* 34, no. 5 (2013); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California,"



## Whites Only

*“...the outcome of decades of federal policies, regional planning, and both outright and structural racism was a concentration of blacks in the central city and southern metro, whites in the suburbs, and an auto-dependent transportation system.”*

### Federal policies

Anticipating the return of servicemen from World War II and desiring to maintain a high level of economic productivity, the federal government enacted a number of policies aimed at reinventing the ways the American people lived and transported themselves. These policies played out in similar ways across the country, with discriminatory outcomes for low-income people and people of color who could not access newly available mortgage financing for suburban homes and who were displaced by recently constructed transportation infrastructure. Proponents of the transition envisioned a strong role for existing downtowns as commercial centers that would be within an easy automobile commute of the new suburbs. Yet they did not predict the suburbanization of economic activity and the broad patterns of regional inequity that would result from federal policies.<sup>6</sup> This section outlines these federal policies and describes how they were enacted locally and regionally in the Atlanta metropolitan region. Housing policies were discriminatory and contributed to the growth of sprawl. The federal government started taking an active role in housing finance during the Great Depression with the creation of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933 and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934. These institutions standardized and subsidized mortgage lending in the United States, unlocking low-cost homeownership for millions of families.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 6-8.

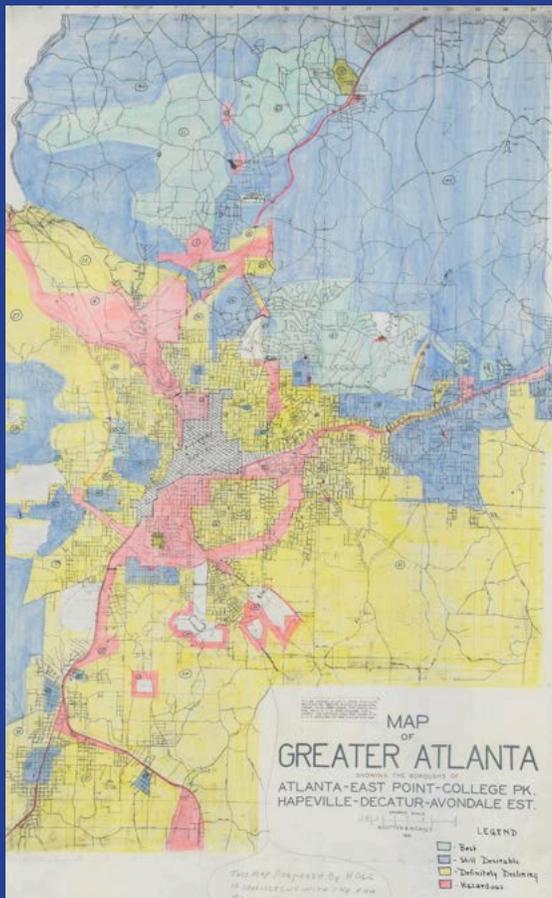
<sup>4</sup> David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations: Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981* (New York: Garland, 1996), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 94.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Myron Orfield, *American Metropolitics: The New Suburban Reality* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011); Manuel Pastor et al., *Regions That Work: How Cities and Suburbs Can Grow Together* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

## 1935 HOLC "Residential Security Map" of Greater Atlanta

*The HOLC's creation of "residential security maps" initiated the federal government's practice of redlining. These maps were part of a uniform system of property appraisal that involved assigning one of four ratings to every block in every city. Neighborhoods were rated as riskier if they were dense, aging, racially mixed or nonwhite (Jackson 1985, 197-99). Shades of blue in the security map (below) are rated "best" and "still desirable" while the yellow and red shades are rated "definitely declining" and "hazardous."*



However, the lending practices institutionalized by the federal government at the time also deprived millions of other families from achieving homeownership. The HOLC refinanced tens of thousands of mortgages near default, but it based its lending decisions on appraisal techniques that favored newly constructed housing in racially homogenous and white neighborhoods. Not only did these techniques, known as "redlining" prevent federal support from reaching Black neighborhoods during the Depression, they would become ingrained in the housing finance industry, affecting lending decisions for the next 40 years.

The FHA and Veterans Administration loan program of 1944 (part of the GI Bill) fueled unprecedented rates of home ownership and housing construction by providing subsidized insurance to private mortgage lenders. The percentage of American families living in owner-occupied homes grew from 44 percent in 1934 to 63 percent in 1972.<sup>8</sup> The FHA insured mortgages that funded almost a third of all housing in the country built between 1938 and 1962,<sup>9</sup> and it also further standardized appraisal, underwriting, and construction standards. Redlining and other racially discriminatory practices were even more prevalent in the FHA than in the HOLC. Its guidelines listed among the adverse influences on a neighborhood the "infiltration of inharmonious racial or nationality groups" and urged the use of racial covenants in land records to protect against neighborhood integration.<sup>10</sup>

The policies effectively meant that Black homeownership rates would never approach those of whites. Less than two percent of the \$120 billion in house construction lending underwritten by the FHA between 1934 and 1962 went to nonwhites. Some historians have called the federal government's subsidy of white homeownership a "\$120 billion head start" for white families, which created substantial wealth through homeownership that could be passed on to subsequent generations. Since Black families could not get loans and had to secure housing through leases and land contracts, they didn't share in wealth building. The effects have lasted for generations.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to blocking Black wealth creation, federal housing policy contributed to a "spiral of decline"<sup>12</sup> in older urban neighborhoods across the country. Redlined communities were ineligible for lending that fueled the construction boom in other, often suburban communities. Blight and decline in property values followed. Many of these communities were also targeted by urban renewal activity following the Housing Act of 1949. The Act authorized federal dollars to fund the acquisition and demolition of urban areas so they could be redeveloped. Its stated intention was to remove "blight" and convert urban land to its "highest and best use" while providing replacement housing for any displaced residents. However, urban renewal has been widely criticized for the destruction of still-vibrant communities and for failing to replace housing units that were demolished. In 1960, less than one quarter of the 810,000 public housing units authorized by the 1949 Act for construction in the next six years had been built. Many of the units that were built were located in public housing projects that became sites of concentrated poverty and substandard conditions by the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for many people and

<sup>7</sup> R. Allen Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing*, 3rd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 205.

<sup>9</sup> Rich Benjamin, *Searching for Whittopia* (New York: Hyperion, 2009), 186.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Immergluck, *Foreclosed: High-Risk Lending, Deregulation, and the Undermining of America's Mortgage Market* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 49.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, *Searching for Whittopia*, 186-87.

<sup>12</sup> Hays, *The Federal Government and Urban Housing*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-80.

<sup>14</sup> Immergluck, *Foreclosed*, 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> David W. Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 19-21.

urban communities excluded from the FHA's expansion of homeownership, urban renewal and public housing were the alternative chosen by the federal government. Beyond its racially discriminatory appraisal system, the FHA preferred newer construction on the edges of metropolitan areas. It also favored single-family detached projects and home purchases rather than denser, multi-family development and repair or improvement of the existing housing stock. The result was sprawling suburban housing around metros throughout the country.<sup>14</sup>

Transportation policies supported population de-concentration and white flight. These sprawling land use patterns were supported wholeheartedly by federal transportation policy that facilitated low-density, automobile-dependent development connected by high-capacity, limited access freeways. Although not often remembered, even Atlanta was similar to other U.S. cities in the early 20th century in that it featured a well-developed streetcar network linking the central business district to the first suburbs. A combination of poor management, and the rise of the automobile, ultimately doomed that first generation of transit systems, and their ridership gradually declined after World War II.<sup>15</sup> Rising automobile traffic presented real challenges for cities that had grown to accommodate pedestrians, horse-drawn carriages, and streetcars. These travel modes often conflicted with each other. Both city planners and traffic engineers began to prepare for the eventual transition to full automobility during the 1930s, preparing grand plans for freeway expansion during the early 1940s under the urging of President Roosevelt.<sup>16</sup>

The 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act designated a 41,000-mile system of highways and committed \$25 billion over a 13-year period to be allocated to states with only a 10% matching requirement. Importantly, the interstate program contained a substantial urban component meant to relieve congestion. With little experience in urban freeway construction, but with free money on the table and a limited time in which to spend it, highway building accelerated quickly. Because the federal government and state highway departments had been intimately involved in road building from the beginning, they were tasked with routing highways through urban areas. This construction often proceeded with minimal public involvement but tacit approval or encouragement from local politicians. The implications for low-income communities and people of color across the United States proved disastrous. According to historian Ray Mohl, the interstate system's urban expressways, or freeways, not only penetrated the cities but they ripped through residential neighborhoods and leveled wide swaths of urban territory. . . In retrospect, it now seems apparent that public officials and policy makers, especially at the state and local level, used expressway construction to destroy low-income and especially black neighborhoods in an effort to reshape the physical and racial landscapes of the postwar American city.<sup>17</sup>

### Lending Discrimination Continues

In the mid-1960s, changes to the FHA underwriting standards that had kept lending out of minority neighborhoods began to end federally-sanctioned redlining (Hays 2012, 92-95). However, racial discrimination remained rampant in the practices of private lenders. The practices were documented by a series of articles in *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* in 1988 entitled "The Color of Money" (see figure at right). Journalist Bill Dedman and a team of researchers found that between 1982 and 1986, financial institutions in the Atlanta area made five times more mortgage loans to whites than to Blacks, even after accounting for different levels of income. Analysis of loan records at savings and loan associations across the county, which made about half of all home loans in the 1980s, revealed that Black loan applicants were rejected more than twice as often as white ones. Dedman called it a "lending gap so pervasive and so wide that in much of the country high-income Blacks are rejected at the same rate as low-income whites" (Dedman, 1989).

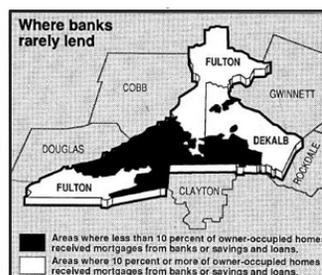
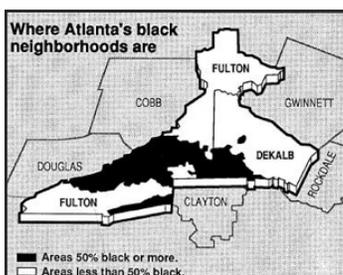
"The Color of Money" brought responses from the Department of Justice, Atlanta financial institutions, and politicians, which led to some litigation and reform, and the creation of a small pool of dedicated mortgage money called the Atlanta Mortgage Consortium. However, the impact of the reforms was dampened by an unwillingness of many Black leaders to publicly challenge financial institutions or demand serious concessions. In the established conciliatory tradition of the "Atlanta Way," Michael Lomax and Maynard Jackson, both candidates in the 1989 mayoral election said, respectively, "My preference would be to raise the issue with the banks in a positive way," and "I like to try to negotiate things first" (Keating 2001, 56-59). A study published in 1999 found that racial geographic disparities in Atlanta mortgage lending improved only slightly after Dedman's articles were published (Wyly and Holloway 1999).

Like HOLC and FHA redlining, discrimination by private lenders has prevented black families from owning homes and building wealth at the same level as whites. It has also contributed to the relative instability and underdevelopment in black and mixed neighborhoods.



## THE COLOR OF MONEY

First of four parts



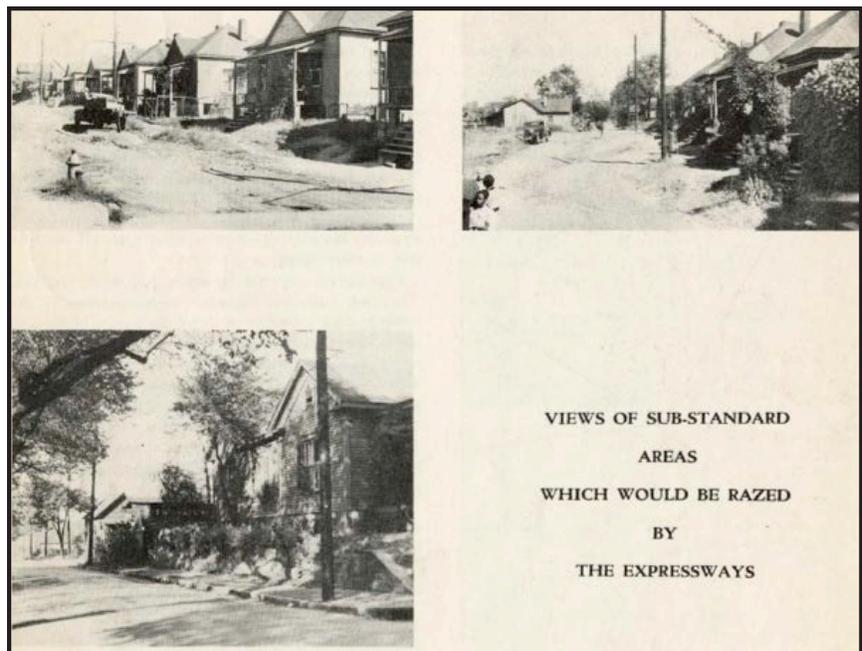
From the beginning, these urban expressways were meant to be used in concert with urban renewal efforts to clear “slums” and “blight” and to free valuable land close to central business districts for redevelopment. The toll that interstate construction took on people and urban areas cannot be overstated. By the 1960s, federal funding for the continued expansion of the interstates was on the decline, and “freeway revolts” across the country, motivated by the effect of construction on communities, had begun to challenge the exclusive focus of federal transportation policy on automobiles and highways.<sup>18</sup> But the damage was already done; a car would now be needed to meet every day needs. Other modes of transportation would be considered second rate.

### Atlanta, 1946-1960s: Planning for an expanding region

In Atlanta, post-WWII city politics became dominated by business leaders focused on regional economic dominance and non-industrial downtown development. They were financially and existentially tied to downtown, not the growing suburban residential areas. Their policies encouraged sprawling residential growth, but sought to maintain and strengthen downtown Atlanta’s position as the vibrant business and cultural center of the metro area. The strategy involved an alliance with leaders in the black community. Business-allied politicians, such as William Hartsfield and Ivan Allen Jr., had little appeal with working class whites, but by taking progressive positions on racial issues, they won the electoral support of the politically ascendant Black community and stayed in power.<sup>19</sup> The elites also thought that a harmonious racial environment would be advantageous for attracting business from beyond the southeast.<sup>20</sup>

Blacks did gain influence and enfranchisement, but their interests remained subordinate to those of downtown business and a largely white elite. Ivan Allen Jr. later remarked that, “For nearly two decades, the black community had been a silent partner in the election of city officials in Atlanta, generally going along with whatever moderate candidate the white business and civic father endorsed.”<sup>21</sup>

During the 1940s and 50s, Atlanta’s business elites and their political allies commissioned several planning studies to guide highway building and land use policy, starting with the 1946 Lochner Report. Consistent with federal transportation policy, that report proposed an ambitious freeway plan based on a predicted 150% increase in traffic between the prewar years and 1965. The freeways would whisk affluent (and white) suburbanites from the metro’s fast-growing outer areas to its still-dominant downtown core.<sup>22</sup>



This image from the Lochner Report illustrates the perceived link between highway construction and urban renewal efforts. Although there are few people present in the photographs, two Black children can be seen in the top right, providing a glimpse of the type of Atlantans that would be displaced.

<sup>17</sup>Raymond A. Mohl, “The Interstates and the Cities: Highways, Housing, and the Freeway Revolt,” (University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2002), 1.

<sup>18</sup>“Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (2004).

<sup>19</sup>Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), Chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup>Virginia H. Hein, “The Image of a City Too Busy to Hate: Atlanta in the 1960’s,” *Phylon* 33 (1972).

<sup>21</sup>Ivan Earnest Allen and Paul Hemphill, Mayor: *Notes on the Sixties* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1971), 220.

<sup>22</sup>H.W. Lochner & Co. and De Leuw, Cather & Co., “Highway and Transportation Plan for Atlanta, Georgia,” (1946).

The Lochner Report's highway system was also designed to barricade downtown from neighborhoods the downtown business elite considered undesirable, continuing a tradition of using transportation infrastructure and policy to encourage segregation.<sup>23</sup> The elevated Downtown Connector freeway would remove and separate low-income Blacks from areas near the central business district. They felt that the presence of this group would hamper downtown growth.<sup>24</sup> Later plans contained similar ideas about freeway construction and displacement. The 1952 Up Ahead plan created by the Metropolitan Planning Commission (the precursor organization to the Atlanta Regional Commission) described enhancing the central business district by removing the nearby Black residential district using urban renewal funding.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, Up Ahead proposed clearing "slum areas" like Auburn Avenue and surrounding neighborhoods, calling them "a definite menace to the health of the downtown area."<sup>26</sup> Black civic leaders were able to convince the Metropolitan Planning Commission to delete any reference to clearing the Auburn Avenue district from its urban renewal plans in 1952, but the Downtown Connector was ultimately completed in the early 1960s.

The facility split the Sweet Auburn business district in two, destroying historic buildings, introducing noisy, high-speed traffic to the neighborhood, and completing its intentional separation from downtown.<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, the construction of the interstates in Atlanta, combined with the application of federal urban renewal dollars decimated Black and low-income white communities that fell in their paths. Some estimates calculated the displacement at approximately 70,000 people, approximately 95% of whom were Black.<sup>28</sup> Replacement housing was generally not provided although it was required by federal law.

After a few planning studies, and consistent with federal transportation policy, Atlanta's elites constructed a highway system that ensured quick and easy access to downtown from the new housing in the suburbs. Urban renewal projects replaced urban communities with attractions for visitors. These achievements sealed the fate of many communities in central Atlanta – a cycle of disinvestment, unemployment and crime followed during the 70s and 80s.



On June 3, 1952, 70-year-old John Wesley Dobbs testified before the Metropolitan Planning Commission (which had no Black members) about its classification of the historic Black neighborhood and business district of Sweet Auburn as a "slum" area to be cleared. Dobbs said:

"In every city of America where Negroes live in large numbers they eventually develop a main business street for Negroes. In Atlanta, Georgia, Auburn Avenue happens to be that symbol of our business progress and achievement. On Auburn Avenue between Courtland Street and North Boulevard, Negroes have erected churches, built brick buildings and substantial business houses all along the street. Negroes own at least 90 percent of the property on Auburn Avenue. Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, corner of Auburn and Butler, was built at the close of the Civil War when Atlanta was unpaved and open creeks were running through her streets. Big Bethel Church has done more to give a moral tone to this section of Atlanta than anything else in that section of the city. Big Bethel Church stands there today on the same corner as a moral Lighthouse for the welfare of the citizens in this part of Atlanta.

"It is true that we are poor people, liberated only 85 years ago, without education or money; and yet in the last 50 years we have acquired property along Auburn Avenue, built businesses like the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, which now has more than \$25 million in assets; the Citizens Trust Company, a member of the Federal Reserve Banking System, with more than \$5 million in assets; Atlanta Mutual Building and Loan Association, with more than \$1.5 million in assets; The Atlanta Daily World, the only Negro daily newspaper in America; a broadcasting station, WERD, 860 on your dial. These are some of the businesses along Auburn Avenue that we feel justly proud of today. It takes sugar to sweeten things and, as you know, it takes money to buy sugar. The acquisition of this kind of wealth along Auburn Avenue has caused us to call it 'Sweet Auburn,' a name now known among Negroes throughout America as a symbol of the development of Negro Business in Atlanta, Georgia.

"Your proposed plan would destroy this development of ours, which represents two generations of sweat and toil. This attempt, ladies and gentlemen, is fundamentally wrong and unsound" (Gary Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: The Saga of Two Families and the Making of Atlanta*, 1996, 189).

The Planning Commission deleted Auburn Avenue from its urban renewal clearance plan, but a decade later the Downtown Connector freeway was built through Sweet Auburn, separating it from downtown and cutting Dobbs' "main business street" in two.

<sup>23</sup>Bayor, "Roads to Racial Segregation."

<sup>24</sup>Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 32.

<sup>25</sup>Keating, *Atlanta*.

<sup>26</sup>Metropolitan Planning Commission, "Up Ahead: A Regional

<sup>27</sup>Land Use Plan for Metropolitan Atlanta," (1952).

<sup>28</sup>Keating, *Atlanta*, 93.



## 1960s – 1970s transit planning and the emergence of MARTA

In its pursuit of a rail rapid transit system during the 1960s, the white business elite continued to aggressively promote Atlanta’s national prominence and boost downtown land values. They thought that rail would attract suburbanites to downtown and contribute to the creation of a cosmopolitan, business capital. Like urban renewal and interstate construction, business interests pushed for rail transit as a way to leverage newly available federal capital funding for public transit, authorized by the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964,<sup>29</sup> to enhance their interests.

Importantly, the impetus for a rail transit system was not a desire to improve citizens’ transportation options. When the existing, Atlanta Transit System conducted a study suggesting that an expanded bus system would better serve Atlanta’s transportation needs at lower cost, MARTA planners hastily rejected its conclusions. They had already dismissed buses as “second rate” and noted that they lacked “social status.”<sup>30</sup> To counter the apparent practicality of buses, MARTA planners promised a new pattern of high-density development around train stations that ultimately did not materialize. Similar dynamics played out in the other two large, heavy-rail rapid transit systems planned and implemented during the 1960s and 70s –the Washington D.C. Metro and the Bay Area Rapid Transit system. In each of these areas and elsewhere, downtown businesses generally supported rail transit systems over buses for reasons mostly related to perception rather than transportation-operational or fiscal considerations.<sup>31</sup> In short, because business elites wanted rail, it was built.<sup>32</sup>

In 1961, the business-allied Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning Commission (ARMP) released the Atlanta Region Comprehensive Plan: Rapid Transit, the first of a succession of plans that would eventually detail the MARTA rail system. It recommended a 60-mile, radial network that followed existing rail lines through five counties. The orientation of existing rail, and the prevailing patterns of residential segregation, meant that rail would provide different levels of service to whites and Blacks. The ARMP plan essentially provided three lines serving white areas, two serving both whites and Blacks, and one serving Black neighborhoods south of downtown.<sup>33</sup>

Rail proponents then moved to secure state authorization and voter approval for an entity that could build their system. In 1965, MARTA was officially established in Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton and Gwinnett counties. Voters in the northern suburb of Cobb County did not approve the creation of the system. In 1968, voters were asked to approve a plan to fund MARTA with new property taxes. Here the business leaders that promoted MARTA were dealt their first major defeat.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Baldwin Hess and Peter A. Lombardi, “Governmental Subsidies for Public Transit,” *Public Works Management & Policy* 10, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>30</sup> Metropolitan Planning Commission, “Access to Central Atlanta,” (Atlanta, GA, 1959).

<sup>31</sup> John F. Kain, “Cost-Effective Alternatives to Atlanta’s Rail Rapid Transit System,” *Journal of Transport Economics and Policy* 31, no. 1 (1997); A.M Hamer, *The Selling of Rail Rapid Transit: A Critical Look at Urban Transportation Planning* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1976).

<sup>32</sup> Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, “Dismantling Transit Racism in Metro Atlanta,” in *Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism and New Routes to Equity*, ed. Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Keating, *Atlanta*.



Although they had supported Atlanta's business leaders for decades, Black voters rejected the proposed property tax measure two to one. Many Black voters were dissatisfied with a lack of input and the proposed design's emphasis on suburb-to-downtown access.<sup>34</sup> Jesse Hill, CEO of the black-owned Atlanta Life Insurance Company, was a leading critic, stating, "... of the 36 miles of transit system to be opened by 1975 only 4.3 miles have been earmarked to serve the large Negro west side population, and this... is totally unacceptable, inadequate and unrealistic as a westward limit."<sup>35</sup>

After the defeat, MARTA appointed Hill to its board and reworked its plans to meet demands of Black leaders. By the time of the next referendum in November 1971, a one-cent MARTA sales tax was on the ballot. The new plans included a major expansion of the bus system, the addition of a major east-west rail line through Black areas, a rail line to the Perry Homes public housing project, minority contracting and employment agreements and a 15-cent fare for at least seven years.<sup>36</sup>

The 1971 funding referendum passed in Fulton and DeKalb counties largely due to Black voters in the City of Atlanta, 55% of whom voted in favor. In those jurisdictions, MARTA could begin collecting the sales tax, buy the Atlanta Transit Company bus system, and start building rail. However, the referendum was defeated in the other two MARTA member counties, Gwinnett and Clayton, with only 23% and 21% voting in favor, respectively. Gwinnett and Clayton counties were mostly rural and many believed that the transit system tax did not make economic sense.<sup>37</sup>

The counties that voted against MARTA in 1971 were also overwhelmingly white. Racial fears were certainly part of their opposition. Some feared that it would promote the scattering of Blacks throughout the metropolitan area. Racial fears and prejudices would play an even more apparent role in attitudes towards MARTA as it expanded and the region became more segregated.<sup>38</sup> Mostly white residents feared that public transit would allow the very people and conditions they just fled using newly available highways to reach their suburban neighborhoods.<sup>39</sup> Not only did this decision limit the reach of an automobile alternative in the region, it ensured from the outset, that MARTA would have a severely limited funding base. This geographically constrained tax base combined with the total absence of state public transit funding – unique among major rail transit systems across the country – put MARTA in a precarious funding situation since the first day its trains started running.

MARTA's original proponents in the business community wanted the system to support the primacy of downtown by providing convenient transportation to downtown for whites living in the northern area of the metro. The system was designed with this goal in mind, not to create an economically efficient transportation system. However, Blacks living to the east, west and south of downtown were responsible for the 1971 referendum's passage, and were paying most of the sales

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<sup>34</sup>Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 191-92.

<sup>36</sup>Keating, *Atlanta*, 123-28.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Jason Henderson, "Secessionist Automobility: Racism, Anti-Urbanism, and the Politics of Automobility in Atlanta, Georgia," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no. 2 (2006).



tax created to fund construction. Therefore, MARTA was forced to build its East and West lines before the North-South one. From its opening in the 1979, the system's riders have been majority Black<sup>40</sup>

The race of its riders influenced MARTA's perceptions in the suburbs from its very beginning. When the North Line opened in the mid-1980s, northside whites largely declined to use it. MARTA was perceived as crime-ridden and used only by poor Blacks – a 1984 study found that its ridership was under half of the original projections and that 4-out-of-5 riders were transit-dependent.<sup>41</sup> A 2000 Brookings Institution report observed that in the Atlanta region, "Public transit, overwhelmingly relied upon by minorities and low-income people who tend to live in the southern parts of the city and the region, is relatively underfunded and constrained by suburban resistance."<sup>42</sup>

The suburban resistance to MARTA typifies a larger trend observed in many American metropolitan regions during the later decades of the 20th century, especially in Atlanta. In his book of the same name, Author Kevin M. Kruse describes "white flight," as a racialized severing of ties with older urban areas, enabled and encouraged by the federal and local government decisions described above. In the homogenous suburbs, a "rhetoric of rights and responsibilities" thrived and whites used segregationist phrases such as "freedom of choice" to support their lack of concern with problems in the metro's urban core and opposition to metro-wide initiatives like annexation by the City and MARTA expansion. A Georgia state legislator said in 1971, "the suburbanite says to himself, 'The reason I worked for so many years was to get away from pollution, bad schools and crime, and I'll be damned if I'll see it all follow me.'" In MARTA opposition, the attitude was exemplified by episodes such as a Cobb County commissioner's promise to "stock the Chattahoochee with piranha" to keep MARTA away or 1987 bumper stickers that read, "Share Atlanta Crime – Support MARTA."<sup>43</sup>

The original conception of MARTA's rail system promised reduced highway congestion and extensive use by suburbanites traveling downtown. But these promises were not realized due to several failures: Dense development around stations did not occur, MARTA was rejected by voters outside of Fulton and DeKalb counties, and suburban whites were not interested in riding trains and buses with urban Blacks. Instead, the growth that started in the late 1970s followed the highways.

### The "Atlanta Boom"

As MARTA operations began in the late 1970s, so did the explosive economic development of the "Atlanta Boom." According to the U.S. Census, the metro region's population grew by 128% between 1970 and 2000. During the same three decades, the population of the City of Atlanta decreased by about 16%. Not only did the metro region become more sprawling as a whole, but patterns of regional inequity were pervasive in the late 20th century. Eighty-six percent of the region's population growth in the 1980s occurred in Cobb, Gwinnett and northern Fulton counties. Instead of opening offices in the city center, the wave of corporate arrivals settled in the northern suburbs.<sup>44</sup> The city of Atlanta's share of the region's jobs slid from 40% in 1980 to 28% in 1990 and 19% in 1997. Economic expansion was also not distributed equitably between the region's suburbs – northern suburban job gains in the 1990s were almost four times southern suburb job gains in the same period.<sup>45</sup>

These geographically disparate growth patterns had a strong racial dimension; the northern areas of the metro that gained jobs and affluence remained mostly white, while the southern areas became mostly Black.

At the end of the boom years of the late 20th century, the outcome of decades of federal policies, regional planning, and both outright and structural racism was a concentration of blacks in the central city and southern metro, whites in the suburbs, and an auto-centric transportation system. Racial fears shaped the initial MARTA system and restricted its expansion. Opportunities to realize a truly integrated, multi-modal transit system, were clearly deferred during the 60s and 70s. These decisions cannot be traced to individually racist acts or blatantly prejudiced policies. Rather, they are the outcome of multiple policies and practices interacting at various levels of government, whose ultimate outcome was not only inadequate for people of color, but also for the region, as a whole, as it continues to struggle with traffic and transportation-related challenges.

<sup>40</sup> Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising* (1996), 198-99.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

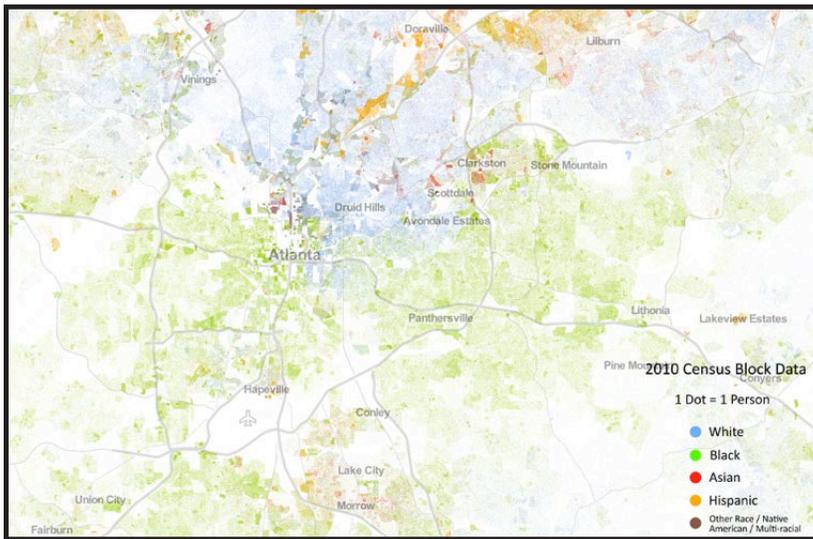
<sup>42</sup> The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, "Moving Beyond Sprawl: The Challenge for Metropolitan Atlanta," (Washington, DC, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Bullard, Johnson, and Torres, "Dismantling Transit Racism in Metro Atlanta."

...“white flight,” a racialized severing of ties with older urban areas, enabled and encouraged by the federal and local government decisions...



The map above illustrates the extent of racial segregation in the Atlanta region. Data from 2010 Census Summary File 1. Image Copyright, 2013, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator).

## Atlanta Today

As detailed above, over the past 30 years, economic development and commercial growth have primarily occurred in Atlanta's northern suburbs. Over the same period, whites and affluent Blacks left urban neighborhoods in the City of Atlanta's south and west with limited opportunities and concentrated poverty. Leading up to the 1996 Summer Olympics, public housing in the City was largely destroyed, and large numbers of Blacks moved to southern counties such as Clayton, Douglas, and Rockdale. The practical result is that low-income Black communities are heavily concentrated south of Interstate 20 and west of downtown and separated from economic opportunity. The geographic distance is exacerbated by the lack of sufficient transit service.

More recently, regional demographics are shifting as the same neighborhoods in the City of Atlanta that were previously abandoned by the affluent are facing gentrification and displacement pressures. The City is still majority non-white, but between 2000 and 2010 it lost 30,000 Black residents while gaining 22,000 whites. By 2010, 85% of metro Atlanta's poor lived in the suburbs. This demographic inversion is creating a new set of transportation and land use challenges.

Notably, these intown neighborhoods enjoy some of the highest quality transit service in the region as well as close proximity to parks and other amenities, such as the Atlanta BeltLine. The displacement of Black and low-income residents from these locations will tend to worsen equity conditions in the region. Explicit policies and planning solutions are needed to prevent this outcome and to ensure that high-quality neighborhoods and convenient affordable transportation services are available to all. The next section discusses what these types of solutions might look like for the Atlanta metropolitan region.

## Policy and planning solutions

Transportation investments affect land use and land use policies affect the transportation decisions made by individuals and households. This symbiosis means that transportation and land use planning should take place concurrently. For example, in areas where congestion is a problem, adding highway capacity by constructing new lanes tends to increase speeds in the short term, but these gains are quickly lost as households and businesses relocate to take advantage of shorter travel times if appropriate land use controls are not in place. Soon, the travel time gains are eroded and congestion returns.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Gilles Duranton and Matthew A. Turner, "The Fundamental Law of Road Congestion: Evidence from US Cities," *American Economic Review* 101, no. 6 (2011).

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*The closest metropolitan Atlanta has come to a region-wide transit agency emerged in the late 1990s, when the region experienced a “conformity lapse”—expected future automobile emissions were not consistent with state clean air plans, placing the region in violation of the federal Clean Air Act.*

Congestion is an indication of the economic desirability and vibrancy of a region. It cannot be eliminated. But many options exist to reduce congestion, many of which have nothing to do with adding highway capacity. For example, residents could be provided with safe and convenient alternatives to driving and options to live close to their jobs and other important destinations. But these approaches require the collaboration of all governments within a region and coordinated transportation and land use planning.

This type of integration holds out the promise of increasing regional equity, as decisions about where to site affordable housing, focus economic development, or locate public transit systems for maximum effect would not be made by a single neighborhood, city, or county, but based on regional consensus.

In this section we describe the governance reforms that would be necessary to achieve such an integrated system and some additional initiatives that could be used to cultivate sources of transportation and affordable housing revenue.

### Governance reforms

In the United States, transportation and land use planning are currently conducted by different levels of government. Major transportation planning activities and some funding decisions are undertaken at the regional level by metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). The MPO for the Atlanta metropolitan region is the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). Land use decisions are undertaken at the local level, by city and county governments who approve particular developments, create zoning standards, and grant exemptions. This disconnect between transportation and land use decision-making means that the residential and commercial density required for successful public transit may not materialize after a new investment or that the affordable housing required for the workers employed in a new mall will not be constructed nearby. There are a number of sensible governance reforms that could be implemented that would mitigate these problems.

In general, the voting structure of MPO boards is established so that each member government gets a single vote, regardless of their population or transportation infrastructure. Since there are more suburban counties than urban areas, this structure leads to the outsized influence of suburban jurisdictions that often favor highway infrastructure provision over transit.<sup>47</sup> In the ARC, for example, the much smaller Cherokee and Rockdale counties have the same voting power as the larger DeKalb and Fulton counties that have greater diversity and travel needs.

While Atlanta has moved past explicit segregation and overt discrimination in housing and land use, the current decision-making process has led to de facto segregation by limiting the location and availability of affordable housing. The lack of effective public transportation linked to emerging job centers prevents low-income people, who are disproportionately people of color, from living and working in entire sections of the metropolitan region.

In lieu of regional affordable housing policy and planning, a transportation-oriented solution to these challenges would be regional transit governance. Metropolitan Atlanta has been discussing the creation of a regional transit governance board for many years. Transit governance is a critical part of achieving racial equity for two reasons. First, new governance holds the promise of decisions made regarding resources and infrastructure to maximize regional benefits rather than the parochial pursuit of local interests. The second reason is that regional governance is key to creating an integrated transit system that optimizes routes based on the collective origins and destinations of riders while also addressing the different needs of those who are transit-dependent, and those who have other commuting options.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas W. Sanchez and James Wolf, “Environmental Justice and Transportation Equity: A Review of MPOs,” in *Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities, Environmental Justice, and Regional Equity*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).



The closest metropolitan Atlanta has come to a region-wide transit agency emerged in the late 1990s, when the region experienced a “conformity lapse” – a scenario in which future automobile emissions were projected to exceed the limits of state clean air plans, placing the region in violation of the federal Clean Air Act. This lapse caused the U.S. Department of Transportation to withhold all transportation expenditures that would add roadway capacity. Gubernatorial candidate Roy Barnes promised to create a transportation “superagency” that would address these problems by coordinating projects at a regional scale, across jurisdictions.<sup>48</sup> A key strategy was to reduce dependency on single-occupancy vehicles by expanding transit.

After Barnes was elected, the state legislature approved his plan and formed the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA). GRTA was to coordinate land use and transportation across the metro region through its authority to veto large development and road projects and to withhold state funding from counties that refused to participate. It also planned to build and operate a new transit system.<sup>49</sup> That MARTA already existed and had been operating a regional transit system for decades, but was not tasked with the transit activities envisioned for GRTA, is a testament to the low regard in which the system was held by some.

Notwithstanding the creation of a new agency, the broad, vague powers the state government gave GRTA were not sufficient to overcome fears among business leaders and local governments that it would usurp their power and impose a radical, anti-road agenda. Its effectiveness in coordinating regional land use and transportation was also limited by distrust and disagreement among competing political factions – suburban counties had different visions than the City of Atlanta; environmental groups did not trust business groups.<sup>50</sup>

GRTA also failed to build an integrated transit system that could serve any significant part of the region’s population. Barnes’ administration decided to try to build a system from scratch, rather than the more feasible task of expanding MARTA’s already-operating system. It was a political calculation stemming from the fact that, as mentioned earlier, MARTA had been racially stigmatized since soon after it opened in 1979 and was led by a Black general manager. The administration knew that it could not turn MARTA into a truly regional transit agency because it would encounter racialized resistance from suburban counties.<sup>51</sup>

Any hope that GRTA would become an effective “superagency” and regional transit system ended when Barnes lost his reelection bid in 2002. The new Republican governor, Sonny Perdue, embraced a conservative ideology that favored cuts in transit funding and local control as opposed to state or regional governance.<sup>52</sup> GRTA’s most visible surviving impact is a fleet of coach buses that exclusively serve commuters between the suburbs and downtown during rush hours. GRTA failed to create an integrated regional transit system and instead exists today as a stark contrast to MARTA, which continues to serve a poorer, majority Black and urban ridership.

At present, there is no formal regional transit governance in metropolitan Atlanta. Each agency in the region is governed, funded, and conducts planning separately. This arrangement is inefficient and limits transit connectivity and integration across the systems that operate in the region.

<sup>48</sup> Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, “Dismantling Transportation Apartheid: The Quest for Equity,” in *Sprawl City: Race, Politics and Planning in Atlanta* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2000), 60.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Miriam Fiedler Konrad, *Transporting Atlanta: The Mode of Mobility under Construction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), CH 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-95.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.



*At present, there is no formal regional transit governance in metropolitan Atlanta. Each agency in the region is governed, funded, and conducts planning separately.*

The issue of coordination and integration has been studied by a number of regional and state committees over the past decade. Currently there is a proposal originating with the existing Regional Transit Committee (RTC) of the ARC that includes proportional voting (by population and funding), but this proposal was not included in the transportation bills introduced in the state legislature's last session.

The RTC proposal calls for three principles that should be included in any proposal for regional transit governance:

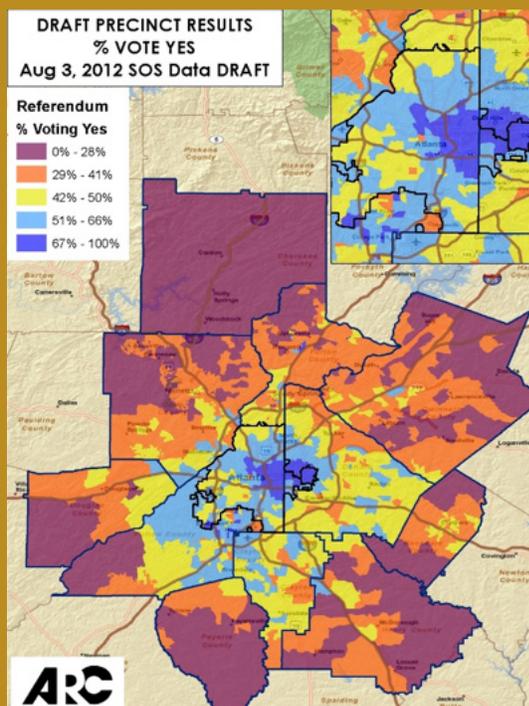
- Unified Decision-Making – the region needs a single entity that will be able to plan, finance, build, own, operate and maintain (or contract for) cross-jurisdictional transit infrastructure and service.
- Voting Structure – in order for an entity to have voting rights in the decision-making process of the region's transit governance structure, that entity must contribute financially to the operation of the region's transit system.
- Proportional Representation – in addition to being required to contribute to the operational expenses of the region's transit systems, and in order to vote at the regional level, the weight of an entity's vote should be proportional to value of its contribution to the system.

### Transportation finance

Aside from the three RTC principles, new sources of transit operating and capital funding must be identified to expand transit service throughout the region. Special local option sales taxes (SPLOSTs), subject to voter approval, have become a preferred mechanism across the country for raising transportation revenue, due to the unpopularity of raising gasoline taxes. These often tie the completion of specific projects to the expected tax revenue. This type of "ballot box planning" is not ideal; selected projects need not be linked to local or regional plans and project lists can only be changed with great difficulty.<sup>53</sup>

Sales taxes are also not a perfect solution to transportation funding needs. During the state primary election in 2012, Georgia voters in the state's 12 regional commission areas considered enacting a one cent sales tax that would fund specific transportation improvements for 10 years, called a "T-SPLOST". In each region, the overwhelming portion of expected revenue (85%) was earmarked for projects selected by a "regional roundtable" composed of local elected officials. In the Atlanta region, the project list had to be constrained to the approximately \$7 billion in funds expected to be available over the 10 year life of the tax.<sup>54</sup> Highway and transit projects received approximately equal shares of funding in the final project list along with a very small portion (1%) reserved for bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

On Election Day, Georgia voters overwhelmingly rejected the measure in all but three of the 12 regions. Despite strong support in the City of Atlanta (see map), the 10-county ARC region<sup>55</sup> rejected the T-SPLOST, with only 38% voting in favor. This outcome was surprising in part because organizations representing supporters of the measure far outspent detractors.<sup>56</sup> Some observers attribute the failure to competing ideas about transportation problems and solutions in the region.<sup>57</sup> A simpler explanation is the lack of a common vision between different counties and lingering racial fears around the expansion of public transit systems. Ultimately, the strange bedfellows of Tea Party conservatives, the Sierra Club, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) found common cause in opposing the T-SPLOST, albeit for very different reasons. Conservatives saw too much money being allocated to public transit projects that would not ease their commute, the Sierra Club felt too much money was dedicated to roads, and the NAACP opposed the geographic distribution of funding, arguing that the T-SPLOST's transit investments did not sufficiently benefit core transit constituencies.



Precinct-level results from the T-SPLOST vote in 2012 showing strong support concentrated in and near the City of Atlanta.

<sup>53</sup> Amber E. Crabbe et al., "Local Transportation Sales Taxes: California's Experiment in Transportation Finance," *Public Budgeting & Finance* 25, no. 3 (2005); Todd Goldman and Martin Wachs, "A Quiet Revolution in Transportation Finance: The Rise of Local Option Transportation Taxes," *Transportation Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2003).  
<sup>54</sup> Laurel Paget-Seekins, "A Region Divided: The Campaign for the 2012 Transportation Referendum in Atlanta, Georgia" (paper presented at the 92nd Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, January 13-17 2013).  
<sup>55</sup> The ARC assumes different planning responsibilities at the statewide level as the 10-county regional commission and at the federal level as the 20-county metropolitan planning organization.  
<sup>56</sup> Edward A. Hatfield, "A Well-Tied Knot: Atlanta's Mobility Crisis and the 2012 T-SPLOST Debate," <http://southernspaces.org/2013/well-tied-knot-atlantas-mobility-crisis-and-2012-t-splot-debate>.  
<sup>57</sup> Paget-Seekins, "A Region Divided."

Despite the failure of the proposed tax measure, Partnership for Southern Equity was instrumental in advocating for equity in both project selection and outcomes from the T-SPLST process. Specifically, PSE organized the “Just Transportation Circle” to advocate for equity principles that were ratified by the regional roundtable. These principles included:<sup>58</sup>

- Robust, integrated regional transit system. Prioritize state-of-good-repair initiatives before expansion, judge bus and rail modes on their merits, address multiple sustainability goals simultaneously, create transit-oriented development that includes affordable housing.
- Accountable governance and participatory processes. Use best practices for effective public engagement and transparency, establish an accountable, autonomous, truly public, regional transit agency.
- Transportation system designed for all users. Implement complete streets policies to ensure that all system users benefit from improvements.
- Funding and investment decisions. Shift priorities from highways to transit and non-motorized modes, measure accessibility rather than mobility, focus investments in areas that have been historically marginalized.
- Strong workforce development and disadvantaged business enterprise program. Emphasize community benefits, so that investments in transportation infrastructure result in training and employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed residents. Disadvantaged business enterprises and small business enterprises should be prioritized during contracting.

Although the 2012 T-SPLST was defeated, subsequent referenda will empower smaller groups of cities and counties to come together to pass sales taxes to fund transportation infrastructure. Georgia Senate Bill 369, signed by Governor Deal in April, 2016 enabled voters in the City of Atlanta to levy a 0.5% sales tax to supplement the existing 1% MARTA sales tax. The new tax, which passed by a wide margin in the 2016 election, is predicted to generate about \$2.5 billion throughout its life. It will end in 2057, matching the expiration date of the existing MARTA sales tax.

As a practical matter, we must tackle the inaccurate perceptions of transit if the region is going to build the political support and ridership necessary to create a robust regional system that provides commuters throughout the entire metro with realistic, non-auto options. The transportation discussion in Atlanta must evolve beyond a myopic conceptualization of the solutions as merely relieving traffic congestion and ultimately transcend the false stereotypes of public transit as a service that only benefits poor Blacks. Instead, the policy conversation must be elevated to forge a multi-modal vision that emphasizes the indelible links between transportation, land use, and population health and well-being. Moving past the transit/race associations in Atlanta will take deliberate, careful, and targeted efforts as well as demonstrable results. Transit will not play a large part in Atlanta’s transportation future without an acknowledgment of the past role that racism has played in limiting MARTA’s expansion.

## Promising Practices

Despite past difficulties, a number of recent examples show that efforts aimed at achieving more equitable transportation solutions can lead to improved conditions across demographic groups in a region. Below, we describe four recent cases where key gains were made by transportation equity advocates: The Clayton County MARTA expansion in Atlanta, the modeling of a social equity-focused transportation-land use scenario by the metropolitan planning organization in the San Francisco Bay Area, the adoption of region-wide equity policies and practices in King County, Washington, and an equitable, transit-oriented development initiative in Minnesota funded by federal grants and philanthropic foundations.

### Clayton County MARTA expansion

In 1971, four counties in the Atlanta metro held a voter referendum on building a regional transit system using a one-percent sales tax levy. Clayton County, then mostly white and rural, overwhelmingly rejected the tax. But in 2014, it voted again and became the first county to pass the MARTA referendum since its inception. Between the referenda, Clayton’s population grew by over 150% and became two-thirds black.<sup>59</sup> The county is situated south of Atlanta and on the opposite side of the metro from the northern counties that gained affluence during the “Atlanta boom” of the 1980s and 90s.

<sup>58</sup> Partnership for Southern Equity, “Moving to Opportunity: The Case for Transportation Equity in Metropolitan Atlanta,” (Atlanta, GA, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>60</sup> Peter Scott, “C-Tran Eyes Extended Hours, New Route, Buses,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Nov 28 2002.

*The transportation discussion in Atlanta must evolve beyond a myopic conceptualization of the solutions as merely relieving traffic congestion and ultimately transcend the false stereotypes of public transit as a service that only benefits poor Blacks.*

Clayton previously had transit in 2001, when it created an independent bus system called C-Tran using state funding. State transit money was easy to come by in the early 2000s because the governor had just formed GRTA and was desperate to improve failing air quality by reducing car dependency. Within a year, C-Tran ridership was double what had been projected and county officials said that the success was “tremendous evidence that the county badly needed C-Tran.”<sup>60</sup> Many people would come to depend on the service and some cited it as a key factor in deciding to move to Clayton County.<sup>61</sup>

A few years after the creation of C-Tran, the state suspended funding it had given Clayton County to launch the transit system. The county was also becoming more transit-dependent. Between 2000 and 2010, its real median income fell by almost a third and its poverty rate doubled.<sup>62</sup> C-Tran’s ridership was heavily represented by the lower end of the county’s changing economic profile. Sixty-five percent of C-Tran riders did not have access to a car in 2009, according to MARTA, while countywide, only 4.4% of workers reported having no vehicle.<sup>63</sup>

Demographic changes associated with the increased transit-dependency were also leading to fiscal problems for the county. The fiscal problems and loss of state funding led the county commission to eliminate C-Tran altogether in October 2009. Its most outspoken member, Commissioner Wole Ralph, said, “Paving roads is a primary duty of the county. Public transit isn’t.”<sup>64</sup> In March 2010, Clayton became the only core metro Atlanta county that lacked public transit. People were forced to move or walk miles every day and many lost their jobs.<sup>65</sup>

Transit advocates identified joining MARTA as the best way to bring transit back to the County but county commissioners only agreed to put a non-binding opinion poll on the ballot in November 2010 rather than the official referendum needed to authorize the sales tax required to join the regional transit system.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, voters supported the opinion poll question: “Should Clayton County become a full participant in MARTA and levy a sales tax in support of MARTA and Clayton County’s public transportation needs?” with 67% in favor.<sup>67</sup> According to Friends of Clayton Transit (FOCT), a coalition of transit advocates that formed shortly after C-Tran was eliminated, the subsequent electoral defeat of Commissioner Ralph and the incumbent commission chair Eldrin Bell stemmed from their failure to support a binding MARTA referendum.<sup>68</sup>



The next opportunity to hold a binding referendum on MARTA was in November 2014. To succeed, transit supporters first needed the state legislature to pass enabling legislation, then county leaders had to arrange a contract with MARTA and put the referendum on the ballot. Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE), another organization fighting for transit in Clayton, worked with state representative Mike Glanton to push for enabling legislation at the state level to allow Clayton County residents to tax themselves in order to join MARTA.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Farber, “C-Tran Winning Clayton Converts,” *ibid.*, 2003 Jan 13 2003.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>63</sup> Ariel Hart, “Clayton Will Analyze Impact of Bus Shutdown,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2009 Oct 21 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Ariel Hart and Megan Matteucci, “C-Tran Sputters to a Stop: Budget Crisis Bringing Bus Service to an End,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 18 2009.

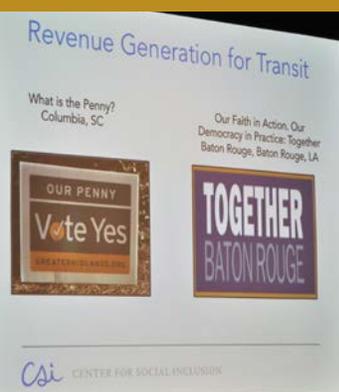
<sup>65</sup> Jeffrey Scott, “Wheels in Motion to Drop C-Tran,” *ibid.*, March 13 2010; Richard Fausset, “Commuters Worry as a Well-Used Atlanta-Area Bus Line Shuts Down,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 1 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Ariel Hart, “Clayton MARTA Vote Won’t Have Force,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 10 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Clayton County, “Online Election Results,” <http://claytoncountyga.gov/departments/elections-and-registration/elections-results>.

<sup>68</sup> David Pendered, “Clayton County Elections: Incumbents Defeated for Anti-Transit Positions,” *Saporta Report*, August 22, 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Molly Bloom, “MARTA Expansion up for Vote,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 6 2014.



PSE built the network, or “equity hub,” in Clayton County during the 2012 T-SPLOST campaign and was able to reactivate it for the MARTA effort. It included small, front-line organizations that lacked the capacity to effect change by themselves, and more powerful groups, including an association of prominent ministers, all organized under the “Power of the Penny” campaign, a reference to the 1% sales tax needed to join MARTA. PSE’s civic network, along with allied groups including labor unions and traditional environmental organizations, persuaded the county commissioners to pass the ordinance that enabled the referendum. Although the county commission hesitated to approve the referendum without an in-depth feasibility study, the measure passed in July 2014.<sup>69</sup>

Through the end of the summer and into fall, advocates led voter outreach campaigns to mobilize support for the referendum. The Power of the Penny campaign held rallies, had members speak during church services, and disseminated their pro-transit message through conventional and social media. On November 4, 2014, the binding referendum passed 73% to 27%.<sup>70</sup> MARTA bus service began in March 2015 with three initial routes and expanded to eight routes by the end of the year. As of 2016, the Clayton County bus routes were being widely used and have been well-received by the traveling public.

### Bay Area transit justice

The San Francisco Bay Area has experienced numerous challenges over transportation and urban development in the past century. The context for, and the set of pressures that are shaping urban development, have shifted substantially over the 20th century. Overt discrimination and segregation in the early 1900s bled into the post-war phenomenon of white flight, selective disinvestment, urban renewal/infrastructure encroachment, and wrenching gentrification. Taken together, these forces have placed an intractable burden on established communities. They have also given rise to changing formal and informal planning frameworks that offer new opportunities – and new barriers – to participation in regional planning by low-income residents and communities of color.

Against this backdrop, policy advocates came together with community groups to create a regional policy and investment platform that would put the needs of disadvantaged communities first during the 2013 regional transportation plan update. Bringing together multiple issue areas – from transit justice, to workforce development, to affordable housing – the group became known as the “6 Wins” coalition.

In June 2011, when regional agencies released five, staff-developed alternative regional plans, the 6 Wins coalition immediately issued its alternative plan, the Equity, Environment and Jobs (EEJ) scenario. The EEJ was designed to protect families in disadvantaged communities by providing improved local transit service, affordable homes near jobs and transit (especially in high-opportunity suburbs), and protections from rampant displacement pressures in the urban core. The EEJ proposed to achieve displacement protection by requiring local governments to produce affordable housing and to put effective community-stabilization measures in place, as conditions of receiving a share of regional infrastructure funding under the “One Bay Area Grant” (OBAG) program.<sup>71</sup> This approach sparked intense debate at the agencies because it brought the needs of disadvantaged communities to the fore in a process that had mostly sidelined them. At first, the agencies refused to analyze the EEJ alternative against those developed by staff; their final “preferred alternative” included no elements from the 6 Wins plan. Ongoing 6 Wins advocacy, including analyses, comment letters, one-on-one outreach to elected officials, and mobilizing community members to attend important meetings, led the agencies to analyze the EEJ as one of the alternatives in the required environmental review of the plan.

In March, 2013, an environmental impact report concluded that the EEJ was the “environmentally superior alternative” outperforming the staff’s “preferred alternative” on a wide range of performance measures, including those relating to air quality, public health and transportation system effectiveness. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) found that the EEJ would result in 83,500 fewer cars on the roads and 165,000 more people riding transit each day than the preferred alternative. They also found that the EEJ would place 15,800 fewer families at-risk of displacement. By the close of the public comment period, the agencies had heard from more than 40 organizations – including groups focusing on public health, the environment, business, and good government – calling

*PSE built the network, or “equity hub,” in Clayton County during the 2012 T-SPLOST campaign and was able to reactivate it for the MARTA effort. It included small front line organizations that did not have the capacity to effect change by themselves, and more powerful groups like the association of ministers, all organized under the “Power of the Penny” campaign, in reference to the 1% sales tax needed to join MARTA. PSE’s civic network, along with allied groups including labor unions and traditional environmental organizations successfully advocated the county commissioners to pass the ordinance that enabled the referendum.*

<sup>69</sup> Marcantonio, Richard, and Alex Karner. “Disadvantaged Communities Teach Regional Planners a Lesson in Equitable and Sustainable Development.” *Poverty & Race* 23, no. 1 (2014): 5-12

<sup>71</sup> Clayton County, “Online Election Results”  
“<http://claytoncountyga.gov/departments/elections-and-registration/elections-results>.”

for the incorporation of key elements of the EEJ scenario into the final plan. At the final hearing before the plan's adoption, the 6 Wins achieved three, last-minute amendments that hold out the promise of real change in the future. Among them are a commitment to adopt a strategy to fund improved levels of transit service, the integration of anti-displacement protections into the OBAG program, and the allocation of \$3 billion in anticipated "cap and trade" revenues in the region, with at least 25 percent to be spent to benefit disadvantaged communities.

### King County, Washington

Recognizing a need to achieve equity across multiple policy and planning areas, King County, Washington launched an "Equity and Social Justice Initiative" in 2005. Since then, the county government has continued to devote resources to the incorporation of equity analyses and solutions throughout all of its departments and activities. Its four notable products are:

1. The King County Strategic Plan 2010-2014: Working Together for One King County which includes a "fair and just" guiding principle. The principle states that county government seeks to "serve all residents of King County by promoting fairness and opportunity and eliminating inequities." This plan is used by county officials for policy, operational, planning, and funding decisions.
2. The Equity and Social Justice Ordinance 16948, adopted in October 2010 lists definitions and steps to achieve the fair and just principle. The ordinance requires the establishment of an Equity and Social Justice Interbranch Team (IBT) that represents all agencies and branches of government and allows for an increased level of accountability.
3. The Equity Impact Review (EIR) tool involves answering a series of questions designed to identify the potential equity impacts resulting from a policy or program. The questions are broken into three stages: **Stage I:** What is the impact of the proposal on determinants of equity? In other words, which equity-relevant areas does the policy or program affect (e.g. transportation, education, housing, food systems). **Stage II Assessment:** Who is affected? Determine which population groups will benefit from and/or be burdened by the project. **Stage III Impact review:** Opportunities for action. This stage involves thoughtful reflection to determine how benefits can be enhanced and burdens can be mitigated.
4. Annual Equity and Social Justice Reports that track and document the county's equity-focused initiatives and progress towards overall equity and social justice goals. An annual Equity and Social Justice forum is also held.

The King County approach of incorporating equity and social justice considerations into all policies and acknowledging the structural determinants of opportunity, including race and income, could be followed by city and county governments in the Atlanta region. It provides a workable, specific model for such an approach and a decade of practice from which to understand lessons learned.

### "Corridors of Opportunity" in the Twin Cities

Corridors of Opportunity was a broad-based, transportation equity-focused initiative active from 2011 to 2013 in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan region. The initiative brought together a wide range of stakeholders to work collaboratively on accelerating equitable development in the region's existing and planned transit corridors. The work included planning activities and direct investment in transit infrastructure, small businesses engagement, and affordable housing development. Equity and community engagement were at the heart of all of the initiative's efforts. Corridors of Opportunity was made possible by a \$5 million Department of Housing and Urban Development

<sup>72</sup> Metropolitan Council, "Corridors of Opportunity Facts," <http://www.metrocouncil.org/About-Us/Facts/PlanningF/FACTS-Corridors-of-Opportunity.aspx>.

<sup>73</sup> Ellen Shelton, Brian Pittman, and Ryan Steel, "Corridors of Opportunity: Final Evaluation Report," (2014).

<sup>74</sup> Metropolitan Council, "Community Initiatives and Projects," <http://www.metrocouncil.org/Communities/Projects.aspx>.

<sup>75</sup> Amy Liu, "Remaking Economic Development: The Markets and Civics of Continuous Growth and Prosperity," (2016).



King County



(HUD) grant and private grants and loans from Living Cities, a national philanthropic organization composed of large foundations and financial institutions. Its activities were governed by a 26-member board that included leaders from government, the private sector, non-profits, and community organizations. The board was co-chaired by officials from the region's MPO and a regional nonprofit foundation.<sup>72</sup>

The work spanned the entire metropolitan region, focusing on seven key transit corridors that had been previously identified by planners and which represented different stages of development. The initiative had two sets of goals: 1) equitable transit-oriented development through its planning and funding activities, and 2) "systems-level change in how transit-related planning and development are done in the Twin Cities."<sup>73</sup> It recognized that minority communities, low-income residents, and other disadvantaged groups have traditionally been excluded from the positive impacts of transit and explicitly worked towards a different, more equitable outcome for the region's transit system.<sup>74</sup>

Corridors of Opportunity has been identified as representing a paradigm shift for leaders thinking about economic development. Inclusion and sustainable growth are becoming more important than the traditional focus on economic competitiveness. The new paradigm involves "working to better link transportation, land use, housing, and economic development to connect low-income neighborhoods to opportunities throughout the metro area."<sup>75</sup> Specifically, Corridors of Opportunity financed affordable and transit-accessible housing, gave loans, grants and technical assistance to hundreds of small businesses, and leveraged millions of dollars in additional funding to support the initiative's goals.<sup>76</sup>

The initiative also focused on the idea that inclusive prosperity requires inclusive planning and it employed an innovative, community engagement strategy. In order to gain significant feedback from those most impacted by the expanding light-rail system, it went beyond traditional channels of community feedback and re-granted \$750,000 of its HUD grant to community organizations to engage the low-income, minority and immigrant communities in the corridors. With these grants, organizations with deep ties to the communities engaged their constituencies and allowed them to shape future investments.<sup>77</sup> The investment in community organizations also built capacity for future efforts after this specific initiative ended.<sup>78</sup>

Corridors of Opportunity serves as a model for MPOs, transit agencies, nonprofits and foundations that decide to work together to realize equitable outcomes around transit.

## Conclusions

The Atlanta metropolitan region has an opportunity to confront its inequitable, racialized past and create the conditions necessary for shared prosperity. But undoing the legacy left by decades of perverse, race-based policies and practices that created starkly unequal opportunities across the metro will require learning from other places and adopting more inclusive approaches. The history is clear: If policy does not change, racial inequity continues.

This report identifies a number of policies that can be implemented in the region, including regional transit governance, the creation of new sources of revenue, and growing the supply of affordable housing. In addition to these specific reforms, regions across the country have taken different – and promising – approaches to advancing regional equity and shared prosperity that range from the grassroots (the Bay area's equity-focused, regional transportation and land use scenario), to the institutional (King County's government-wide equity initiative). These each provide lessons and examples that can be applied to metropolitan Atlanta.

The results are clear: Policies and practices that lead with equity create outcomes that are better for the region as a whole. This region must seize the opportunity presented by new transit funding and ongoing demographic shifts; it can no longer afford to be deferred.

<sup>76</sup> Shelton, Pittman, and Steel, "Corridors of Opportunity: Final Evaluation Report."

<sup>77</sup> D. Bergstrom et al., "The Sustainable Communities Initiative: The Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities," *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development Law* 22, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>78</sup> Shelton, Pittman, and Steel, "Corridors of Opportunity: Final Evaluation Report"

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