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# Defining a transit vision for Atlanta

By JOHN H. EAVES

Pick a city that has excellent transit services — not just in the urban center — but for the region as a whole. Think about Boston, Washington, or perhaps San Francisco. Then imagine designing a vision to bring our own region up to par with those great cities.

Start with the transit assets we currently have in this region, namely MARTA, Xpress and the county transit systems.

Next, extend that vision outward and provide bus service to the counties without a local bus service. After that, extend MARTA rail and construct a series of commuter rail lines where they make sense.

Lastly, put in state-of-the-art transit technologies like light rail, bus rapid transit, and modern streetcars to unclog the bottlenecks and get the system moving.

Now what do you have? You've imagined a regional transportation system that would address the often-heard complaint that "transit doesn't get me where I want to go, and doesn't get me there fast enough."



► John Eaves is chairman of the Fulton County Commission a board member of the Transit Planning Board.

I joined a bi-partisan group of 12 locally elected officials and other representatives in conducting this very exercise on behalf of our region.

This group, known as the Transit Planning Board, came together in 2006.

For the last two years, the TPB has remained focused on one central goal: to develop the vision that will take transit in our region to the next level. At our August meeting, we adopted a plan to guide transit investments in this region. Since that time, many of the agencies and local governments that have been a part of TPB have passed resolutions in support of this vision.

Thanks to this rare moment of regional consensus, we now have a vision for the future of transit. This plan, known officially as "Concept 3," is comprehensive, bold, and ambitious. Imagine increasing the percentage of workday trips taken by transit at the five largest activity centers in our region from 15 percent, as is the case today, to 21 percent, or, with appropriate shifts in land use, to 39 percent by 2030. These changes are achievable, and the benefits of these transit investments outweigh the costs by a five-to-one margin.

Before our August vote, TPB shared our vision of regional transit with the public. What we found was that the public sees the value of increasing metro Atlanta's investment in public transportation. Voters in each of the 11 counties were supportive of funding strategies, such as a transportation sales tax. The chief complaint we heard was urgency — people wanted to see the transit investments detailed in our plan realized sooner. These results rang true not just for Fulton, but for each of the other 10 counties.

The public feedback we received makes it clear that the people of Fulton, much the same as people in the rest of the region, want to live in a region with excellent — even "world-class" — transit service.

Atlanta can and should be a world-class city with world-class transit throughout our region. I have seen the future. With the help of forward-thinking residents, policymakers and lawmakers, it can be accomplished.