



April 15, 2016

Mr. Douglas Hooker
Executive Director
Atlanta Regional Commission
40 Courtland Street, NE
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Mr. Hooker,

On behalf of the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition, Citizens for Progressive Transit, Georgia Bikes, the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club, Partnership for Southern Equity, PEDS, and the Southern Environmental Law Center, we are writing to provide recommendations on the types of projects that should be included on the project list for the Fulton County transportation special purpose local option sales tax ("TSPLOST") referendum.

The TSPLOST referendum presents an opportunity for the residents of Fulton County and its cities to not only make a substantial investment in their transportation infrastructure, but to improve the performance of the county's existing infrastructure and rectify the historical imbalance in the infrastructure that is available. A better-performing and more diverse portfolio of transportation investments will, in turn, afford Fulton County residents greater choice in their transportation options. Finally, given the scope and scale of Fulton County's transportation needs, it is imperative that these funds be spent judiciously and effectively.

We therefore submit the following twelve policy recommendations to guide the selection of projects to be included in Fulton County's TSPLOST project list.

- 1. Focus on projects that are quick, low cost, and high impact.** Historically, because Fulton County has been unable to enact a county transportation SPLOST, funding for local, community-level projects has been extremely limited. As a result, small-scale projects like sidewalks, traffic signal improvements, and pedestrian safety measures have been frustratingly difficult to build. Yet these same projects have the potential to

provide the most direct, tangible, and cost-effective improvements for area residents. A block grant program (or programs) should be created to reserve funding for these types of low cost, high impact projects.

- 2. Prioritize maintenance projects.** Fulton County and its cities face a substantial backlog of maintenance and repair projects on their roads. The cost to maintain a road increases dramatically the longer required maintenance is deferred. Therefore, the most fiscally responsible approach is to ensure that Fulton County's road maintenance needs are met before expanding the county's road network.
- 3. Avoid expensive permitting, engineering and right-of-way acquisition.** The TSPLOST should focus on projects that are deliverable and will provide tangible benefits in the short term. Projects that require substantial investment in non-construction costs, such as planning, engineering, permitting, and right of way acquisition, should not be included on the list. Such projects present a higher risk of not being delivered in the TSPLOST period and require substantial resources for project elements that offer no tangible transportation benefits.
- 4. Use a multimodal approach.** The TSPLOST law provides a great deal of flexibility in the types of transportation projects that are eligible for funding. In addition to roads, TSPLOST funds can be used for sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and transit operations. Given the difficulty in funding these projects through other means, and the recent increase in state funding available for roads, it is important to use the flexible TSPLOST funds to build transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects.
- 5. Road projects should use a Complete Streets approach.** Whether maintenance or new construction, all road projects on the project list should adopt a Complete Streets approach. This means that roads should be designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. The Georgia Department of Transportation and a number of Fulton County cities have adopted Complete Streets policies, and even those projects that do not fall within these policies should nonetheless use the Complete Streets approach.
- 6. Improve safety for drivers and non-drivers.** Traffic fatalities have steadily increased over recent years. These fatalities not only include drivers, but also pedestrians and cyclists struck by automobiles. In fact, pedestrian fatalities reached a twenty year high in 2015 and Fulton County had the highest number of pedestrian fatalities of any county in Georgia. Bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements will not only improve the county's transportation options, but will literally save lives.

- 7. Prioritize investment in existing plans.** Dozens of plans have been prepared over recent year for cities and key corridors in Fulton County under the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Livable Centers Initiative. These plans often recommend transportation projects that have not been fully funded or implemented. Cities should prioritize funding projects that have already been identified and studied in these LCI plans.
- 8. Anticipate future funding opportunities.** The TSPLOST project list will cover projects over the next five years, so it is important to anticipate future funding opportunities that may arise during that window. For example, the Atlanta Regional Commission is likely to solicit projects under two federal transportation funding programs, TAP and STP-Urban, in the latter years of the TSPLOST period. Both of these programs allow federal funds to be used for the majority of a project’s cost, provided that local funds are available to pay for the rest. Reserving a portion of the TSPLOST funds for such opportunities will ensure that Fulton County and its cities can compete for these federal funding opportunities.
- 9. Improve the connectivity of bicycle and pedestrian networks.** The TSPLOST list should include bicycle and pedestrian projects that complete the existing network. Many areas of Fulton County have gaps in their sidewalk and bicycle lane networks, where facilities start and stop suddenly. These gaps deter people who would otherwise consider walking or biking, but are unwilling to do so without dedicated facilities. Projects that fill in these gaps will improve the function and performance of the system as a whole.
- 10. Increase access to job centers and transit stations.** Many of Fulton County’s jobs are located in areas only accessible by automobile. This proves a barrier to employment for those without a car and makes automobile ownership a significant expense for those that do. Even jobs located near transit require workers to access the transit service in the first place. Projects which improve access to job centers and transit lines will not only provide transportation benefits, but also economic and equity benefits.
- 11. Projects should enhance existing communities, not displace them.** The TSPLOST projects must be selected to avoid displacing existing communities, either directly or indirectly. This can be accomplished by focusing expenditures on maintenance projects and by prioritizing projects that are part of a community plan with an affordable housing component. Likewise, the TSPLOST’s public outreach efforts must engage with all communities and the TSPLOST oversight committee should include economic displacement in its scope of review.

12. Attempts to build our way out of congestion will not be successful. Given metro Atlanta’s pervasive traffic congestion and latent traffic demand, no suite of new road projects will reduce Fulton County’s traffic. At best, widening a road with TSPLOST funds will push the inevitable traffic jam further down the road. Instead of using limited TSPLOST funds in an unsuccessful attempt to build our way out of congestion, the project list should focus on smaller scale, localized investments that maintain existing infrastructure, improve accessibility at key destinations, and provide transportation options.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and your hard work to improve the transportation options available to Fulton County residents. We would be happy to discuss these recommendations further or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Serna

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cc:

Fulton County Mayors

Fulton County Commissioners
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