



A week ago in this space, State Transportation Board Chairman Jay Shaw wrote of the importance of customer care. It is no less important to a government agency providing services than to a private concern marketing products. Indeed, it may be even more important as government's "customers" usually have paid in advance, mandatorily.

Quality customer service is as much about the "how" as the "what." For the Georgia Department of Transportation in Metropolitan Atlanta, the what is obvious – more convenient mobility and access. The rub is in the how?

Already, there are more Metro Atlantans than residents of 30 states and growth continues unabated. Transportation funding challenges are well documented. Building an urban expressway is expensive – just one more lane on a Metro interstate costs upwards of \$3 million a mile; a new interchange – more than \$30 million. (Moreover, those prices don't include what often is the costliest part – the right of way on which to construct.) And if money were abundant, is a new lane necessarily the answer when even now our interstates flow freely some 18 hours a day?

All this has caused the Department to rethink "how." In doing so, we've come to realize the need not just to grow our transportation system, but to maximize its existing capabilities; to wring from it every modicum of mobility. As necessity is the mother of invention, congestion is the mother of innovation.

An obvious need is clearing roadways of crashes and breakdowns as quickly as possible; every minute traffic is stalled requires as many as seven to recover. So we've broadened the number and range of the Highway Emergency Response Operators – our HEROs. Their proficiency in clearing incidents is unmatched and we'll soon once again add to their number and territory. In a unique partnership with the Department of Public Safety, Georgia DOT also funds State Troopers dedicated to responding to and clearing incidents so Metro traffic keeps moving.

Peak-hour shoulder lanes on sections of Georgia 400 help move southbound morning commuters faster. And brand new connector distributor lanes alongside part of Interstate 20 are producing astonishing time savings of nearly 200 percent. Both are innovations we'll be applying in other locations throughout Metro.

As is the award-winning Diverging Diamond Interchange at Ashford-Dunwoody Road and Interstate 285, a project so successful there are already five more in the works.

Ramp meters on entrance ramps have improved Interstate traffic flow by 14 percent.

Our Regional Traffic Operation Program is a multi-jurisdictional, cutting-edge signal timing program; Department engineers actively manage and synchronize more than 4,000 traffic signals on some 18,000 miles of roads and streets. They have improved traffic flow and reduced stops by nearly 10 percent.

Roundabouts instead of signalized intersections can result in safer, more efficient traffic flow at a fraction of the cost.

Our new "Quick Response" operational improvements program allows us to expedite projects like restriping or installing medians or turn lanes – small efforts that yield big improvements to drivers.

Next year we'll implement variable speed limits on the Top End of I-285 – a program that will enhance motorist safety while simultaneously reducing travel times.

Of course big issues and big challenges remain. But every minute and every dollar we save through innovation help us move forward and better define the “how” of Georgia DOT’s customer service.

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