







# Georgia Statewide Transit Plan

Summer 2019

#### Highlights of

Existing Conditions and Future Trends Analysis The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is developing a Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP) that will identify statewide transit needs and opportunities, incorporate local and regional plans, and recommend implementation strategies to address unmet needs. The Existing Conditions and Future Trends Analysis provides insights into the over 144 million transit trips taken throughout the State of Georgia; highlighting future needs, opportunities, and challenges for existing transit systems and areas of the state currently without transit.

The following is a summary and analysis of Georgia's existing public transit systems. It also identifies and investigates emerging trends in population shifts, changing demographics, and existing economic conditions that may affect the further development of public transit in the State of Georgia.

## **PUBLIC TRANSIT** IN GEORGIA

Public transit in Georgia typically consists of two types of systems: urban systems that primarily provide fixed-route bus service, and rural systems that provide curb-to-curb demand-response (DR) transit. Demand-response systems are flexible, typically relying on telephone booking, requiring reservations to be made a day or more in advance.

The State of Georgia is currently served by 80 systems providing rural transit service. There are five multi-county systems serving a total of 36 counties, though most rural counties operate their own public transit systems. Rural systems provided nearly 1.8 million trips for Urban transit trips were provided Georgians in 2017.\*

Seventeen urban systems provided nearly 143 million trips in 2017.

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GDOT supports transit in Georgia by partnering with local transit providers to offer planning, financial, training, and compliance support while administering Federal Transit Administration grants programs for:

- Rural transit (Section 5311),
- Small urban transit (Section 5307),
- Metropolitan and statewide transportation planning (Section 5303/5304), and
- Intercity bus coordination (Section 5311(f))

mostly via local fixed-route bus, but also using heavy rail, bus, vanpool, paratransit, streetcar, and ferry vehicles. The Atlanta metropolitan area accounts for 91.8 percent of public transit trips in Georgia across various modes, including fixed-route bus, unidirectional commuter bus, and heavy rail transit. The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) is the state's largest public transit provider and supplied more than 126 million trips in 2017. The State's next largest provider, Chatham Area Transit, provided 3.9 million trips in the Savannah area.\*

Northwest Georgia 262,208 trips

 $(\mathbf{1})$ 



\*Source: National Transit Database 2017

**Rural Passenger Trips** 

Outside of the Atlanta Area

### **Types of Transit Service**



**Demand-response** (DR) bus service operates in response to calls from passengers to the public transit operator, who then dispatches a vehicle to pick up the passengers and transport them to their destinations. DR service does not operate over a fixed route or schedule, and involves picking up and dropping off passenger at multiple origins and destinations.

**Fixed-route** bus service is provided on a repetitive, fixed schedule basis along a specific route with vehicles stopping to pick up and deliver passengers to specific locations. Each fixed-route trip serves the same origins and destinations.





**Vanpool** is comprised of vans and other vehicles operating as a ride sharing arrangement, providing transportation to a group of individuals traveling directly between their homes and a regular destination within the same geographical area. Vanpool differ from carpool in that they are publicly sponsored.

**Flex route** service operates similarly to conventional fixed-route bus service along a fixed alignment or path with scheduled time points at each terminal point, but also stopping at key intermediate locations. Conceptually, flex route fits somewhere between fixed-route and demand-response bus service. [Photo credit: CobbLinc]



**Microtransit** service offers flexible routing and/or flexible scheduling of minibus vehicles. Microtransit providers use instant exchange of information, enabling both real-time and advance matching of demand and supply. Conceptually, microtransit fits somewhere between private individual transportation (cars or taxicabs) and public mass transit (bus).

**Express bus** service is intended to run faster than normal bus services between the same two commuter or destination points. Express routes make fewer stops



than local bus services and often utilize quicker or more direct routes, such as highways or restricted access lanes.



**Intercity transit** is comprised of regularly scheduled bus or rail service, connecting two or more urban areas.

**Heavy rail** utilizes an electric railway with the capacity for a heavy volume of traffic. It is characterized by high speed and rapid acceleration passenger rail cars; separate rights-of-way from which all other vehicular and foot traffic are excluded;





raised platform loading; and sophisticated signaling.

**Streetcar** is a rail public transit mode operating entire routes predominantly on streets in mixed-traffic. This service typically operates

with single-car trains powered by overhead catenaries and with frequent stops.

**Ferry** service is comprised of vessels carrying passengers over a body of water. [*Photo credit: Chatham Area Transit*]



### **DEMOGRAPHIC** TRENDS

By 2050, the state is expected to grow to over 14.7 million people, up 44 percent from 2017.

#### **Rural Population Growth**

**30%** 3.9 mil. → 5.1 mil.



#### **Urban Population Growth**

**52%** 6.3 mil. → 9.6 mil.



\*Each dot represents 100K people. Solid dots represent current population; hollow dots represent future population growth. Georgia is the ninth-most-populous state in the country and continues to grow, both in terms of population and employment. The US Census Bureau has estimated the population of Georgia to be over 10.2 million in 2017, up from 8.2 million in 2000.

Georgia's growth trend is projected to continue over the next three decades. By 2050, the state is expected to grow to over 14.7 million people, up 44 percent from 2017. Rural areas of the state are projected to grow by 30 percent, increasing from 3.9 million to 5.1 million. The state's urban areas are expected to grow 52 percent, from 6.3 million to 9.6 million. Of particular interest is the growth in the population of older Georgians. The segment of the population aged 60 and older is expected to more than double, from 2.0 million in 2017 to 4.21 million in 2050, resulting in a boost to populations with a likelihood of using or relying on transit.

The population of areas serviced by rural public transit systems has seen a 3.3 percent population increase since 2010, with areas served by urban public transit growing 7.5 percent. Areas without public transit service grew at a lower rate of 3.0 percent.

Employment opportunities in Georgia have also been increasing, with the state seeing a 14.7 percent increase since 2010. Growth has been positive in every region of the state. Since 2010, areas served by either an urban or rural public transit system saw employment grow by an average of 17.3 percent and 12.3 percent, respectively. Areas not served by public transit lagged with employment growth of 10.4 percent over the same period.



Below state percentage



25 - 49.9% higher than state percentage

More than 50% higher than state percentage



Minority



Low Income





Transportation planning research indicates the following socioeconomic factors can be indicators of an individual's likelihood of using or relying on transit.

- Minority
- Low Income
- Limited English
  Proficiency (LEP)
- Elderly
- Youth
- Disabled
- Zero-Car Households

Federal and state planning requirements also require transit planners to consider the impacts of transit service to vulnerable or disadvantaged populations. The demographic patterns presented in this analysis will help inform the needs analysis and recommendations of the SWTRP. In 33 counties, more than 10 percent of households do not have access to a vehicle.



### REVIEW OF **EXISTING PLANS**

In the preparation of this report, relevant planning documents from state, regional, and local agencies were reviewed.

Reviewed plans include previous state plans, such as the GDOT Statewide Transportation Plan; transit development plans; regional commission plans; long range transportation plans compiled by Georgia's 16 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs); as well as the transportation or comprehensive plans for each of Georgia's 159 counties.

## **Common themes** found in the plans include:



Coordinating land use, future development, and transportation

### EMERGING TRENDS, OPPORTUNITIES, & CHALLENGES

As Georgia grows, demand for transportation services grows as well. Public transit remains an important modal choice for Georgians, but will face new challenges associated with a growing population. Public transit is increasingly viewed as a key driver of economic development, connecting Georgians to jobs, healthcare, and educational opportunities.

As communities grow or merge with a larger urban area, the Federal regulations regarding funding assistance change. Larger communities are expected to shoulder more of the administrative and fiscal burden stemming from the operation of their public transit systems. For example, moving from a small urban transit system (from 50,000 to 199,999 population) to a large urban system (200,000 or more in population) can restrict the Federal operating assistance for which a system is eligible, and increases the system's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) reporting responsibility.

Mitigating these challenges and finding additional local funding for operating expenses will be a major concern as Georgia continues to grow. This transition previously impacted public transit systems in the state following the 2010 Census, and will likely impact several systems after the 2020 Census. As the large urbanized areas continue to grow in Georgia, this trend will continue with surrounding smaller urban systems on the fringe of larger urbanized areas.

Rapid advances in technology are also changing the face of transportation in Georgia. Ride-hailing platforms have become increasingly popular, and both supplement and compete with mass transit. Other infrastructure developments like managed lane systems can create greater capacity for public



transit along major highway corridors. Interconnected digital innovations like signal priority and real-time trip scheduling will increase the speed, reliability, and convenience of public transit in both urban and rural areas. Finally, the potential for change seen in connected and automated vehicle technology is of an almost unprecedented magnitude.

With Georgia's population expected to surpass 14.7 million by 2050, demand for transportation services will reach an all-time high, surpassing 5.4 million home-based work trips taken via automobile every day. Of those trips, 1.8 million are expected to cross county lines. Though new technologies and modes may change the appearance or characteristics of shared transportation systems, public transit will remain a proven and critical modal option to mitigate congestion increases and ensure all Georgians have access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities.

Georgia's rural public transit providers will face new challenges as their service areas grow or are absorbed into a larger urban area, including changes in federal funding, shifting travel patterns, and new travel demand. Georgia's elderly population is increasing and expected to grow 175 percent by 2050, with much of the growth occurring in rural communities. As the proportion of older Georgians grows, public transit services will need to expand and evolve to meet the rising number of Georgians who can no longer drive.



### **NEXT STEPS**

This analysis represents the first step in understanding and interpreting these issues surrounding transit in Georgia. GDOT will continue reviewing transit trip data and demographic trends to quantify the state's transit needs and develop potential solutions.

Moving forward, the planning process will rely on stakeholder interviews and extensive public engagement to identify additional public transit needs, challenges, and service gaps. The final SWTRP will include recommendations and implementation strategies for efficient, effective, and forward-thinking public transit service that meets the needs of all Georgians.









### www.dot.ga.gov/IS/Transit/TransitPlan



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