

CASE STUDY

FIRST AND LAST MILE CONNECTIONS: ATLANTA, GA

Mile High Connects (MHC) is a partnership of private, philanthropic, and nonprofit organizations committed to developing inclusive, affordable, and livable communities within walking distance of public transit. In 2015 MHC identified and prioritized First and Last Mile Connections (FLMC) as a critical part of study to make sure that every transit rider could easily and safely get to and from their transit connection. As a member of MHC, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) undertook research and developed three case studies that looked at FLMC best practices in the Denver region and nationally. FLMC refers to the facilities, infrastructure, and services that allow people to get from their front door to their final destination via transit without driving a personal vehicle. The comprehensive objective is to provide MHC with useful information, tools and a set of best practices to complement their regional and local work around social and equitable transit solutions. The first two case studies focus on the interface and relationships between the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), local jurisdictions, and transit agencies progressing FLMC enhancements in the Salt Lake City and Atlanta regions. The third case study focuses on emerging and existing shared mobility models and systems that are striving to provide sustainable transit service to low-income communities and communities of color. Additionally, this case study highlights some of the best practices, tools, and technologies and where they have best worked in more disadvantaged communities.

CONTEXT

The Atlanta metropolitan region is a key geographic study of urban core and suburbanized poverty and social immobility in the United States. Deemed the “Sultan of Sprawl,” Atlanta’s city center is experiencing vast economic growth, while low-income and residents of color are still battling for social equity and environmental justice.¹ Atlanta has a unique opportunity to implement smart growth strategies and policies through compact development and access to high-frequency public transit. New plans and programs are being developed, adopted, and implemented to assist FLMCs. The progress is seen mostly in sidewalk and street crossing improvements. Atlanta is home to a first generation transit system. Its government and regional partners are in the process of rebuilding equitable programs and transportation structures to serve its citizens. Although Atlanta’s transit agency, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and local jurisdictions have not always seen eye to eye, they are now producing good examples of regional and top-down FLMC strategies and policies. Although FLMCs have not been formally institutionalized in Atlanta’s government policy, collaborative partnerships under the existing interface are producing progressive results.

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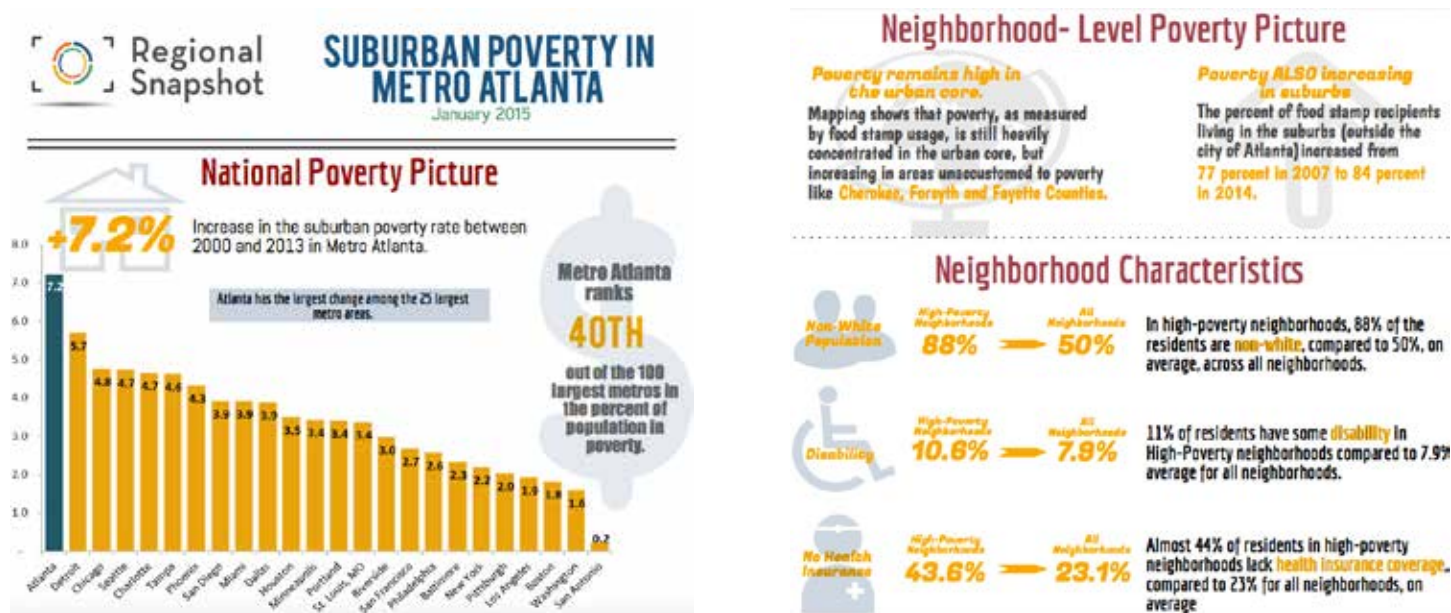
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FIGURE I.1



Source: <http://news.atlantaregional.com/?p=1915>

Transit is a critical means to connect Atlanta communities to opportunity. Access to transit directly correlates to impacts on a family’s budget, and funds that might otherwise be used for food, education, and healthcare. Coordinated and collaborative strategies and investments in infrastructure in the Atlanta region are helping to address first and last mile connections at Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) stations. The nexus between transit access and social equity in Atlanta is clear:

- Atlanta ranks 18th out of the top 20 cities for monthly savings from transit ridership. Core transit riders could save approximately \$766 on transportation costs per month by taking public transportation for a total of \$9,195 per year.²
- An average of 6 percent of households in the 10-county Atlanta region do not have access to a vehicle—some counties have a much higher percentage.³
- The State of Georgia spends a mere 63 cents per capita on transit.⁴

REGIONAL AGENCIES

Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)

MARTA is Atlanta’s primary transit system and it is an aging system with significant deferred maintenance. MARTA provides rail and bus transit, streetcars, and regular metro-wide bus routes. What MARTA lacks in service typologies, it makes up in level of service to more than 422,400 people per day.⁵ MARTA operates in four counties: Fulton, Clayton, Cobb, and DeKalb. MARTA maintains a set of regional transit partners, most notably with the Atlanta Regional Commission, Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, and the Georgia Department of Transportation. From a technology standpoint, MARTA does provide a host of geo-location static data options, and regional connection maps. However, MARTA On the Go, the system’s mobile app with geo-location for bus and train service, is not Spanish compatible. Lastly, MARTA has reduced fares for Medicare cardholders.

Prior to 2012, MARTA was on the path to insolvency, due to decreasing revenues and federal and state funding. CEO Keith Parker’s arrival in December 2012 marked the beginning of the agency’s stabilization efforts. The first critical component of MARTA’s turnaround was the launch of a transit-oriented development program that provided guidance to convert excess parking lots into strategic and desirable real estate. Included in the transit-oriented development (TOD) policies, 20 percent of new development or redevelopment was allocated to affordable housing. Additional MARTA-led parking policy adjustments now allow for development over old surface and structured parking. In partnership with the

Atlanta Bicycle Coalition, MARTA dedicated \$550,000 to last mile improvements at 26 identified stations in Atlanta, now under construction. These improvements include \$100,000 for bike parking, \$150,000 for curb channels to move bikes up stairwells, \$150,000 for pedestrian accessibility improvements, and \$150,000 for wind shelters.⁶ The second component was the development of MARTA's real-time transit information system, which cost less than \$50,000.⁷ Savings reinvestment has led to new natural gas fleets, but most importantly, fares have remained flat. MARTA has a new vision for service, economy, arts, and technology (SEAT). SEAT's goals include improved bus service, a continued study of system expansion opportunities, new public art around stations, and improved Wi-Fi access and mobile fare payment.

City of Atlanta

Atlanta's Office of Transportation, which is part of the Department of Public Works, is responsible for the City's street network and capital and infrastructure improvements projects. As of 2011, the City of Atlanta and MARTA formally agreed to improve transit in MARTA service areas. "By virtue of an action taken by the Atlanta Regional Commission, certain federal funds were transferred to MARTA, and in exchange MARTA committed to fund qualified projects contained in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) from MARTA's capital budget for the installation of pedestrian accessibility and safety improvements in the public right of way near MARTA transit stations."⁸ The 2000 Quality of Life Bond totaled \$150 million ended in 2011. The bond was approved by Atlanta voters to fund community improvements, including sidewalks, plazas and greenspace, streets, bridges and viaducts, and traffic control devices. Projects were identified and assessed based on priorities by the Department of Public Works and the Atlanta City Council. A General Obligation Bond is a type of municipal bond secured by a state or local government taking a full faith responsibility to repay bond holders through City credit, tax revenues, and other available resources. GOBs are used to raise funds for the City's capital improvements that benefit the entire community, i.e. road repairs. These improvements typically do not produce revenues. Principal and interest are payable from an ad valorem tax levied on all taxable property within the City.

FIGURE I.2: City of Atlanta Renew Atlanta Infrastructure Bond project allocation¹²

	Citywide		Local		Total
Transportation Projects	\$134,515,175	+	\$51,941,543	=	\$186,546,718
Municipal Facilities	\$44,854,328	+	\$18,688,954	=	\$63,543,282
Total	\$179,369,503	+	\$70,630,497	=	\$250,000,000*

* Note: (1) Amount is strictly project related costs and excludes \$2M for bond financing costs.
(2) City of Atlanta staff and Council Members are having ongoing discussions to finalize the local list of projects.

Project Type	Amount
Citywide - Transportation Projects	
Traffic Signals	\$40,789,593
ADA	\$5,239,992
Roadway Resurfacing	\$25,735,330
Complete Streets	\$33,606,214
Bridges	\$29,144,046
Transportation Subtotal	\$134,515,175
Citywide - Municipal Facilities	
Public Safety VIC	\$3,143,995
Parks and Recreation Centers	\$18,339,971
Facility/Main and Upgrades	\$11,003,982
Public Art Program	\$12,366,380
Municipal Facilities Subtotal	\$44,854,328
Total - Citywide Projects	\$179,369,503
Local - Transportation Projects	\$51,941,543
Local - Municipal Facilities	\$18,688,954
TOTAL - Local Projects	\$70,630,497
TOTAL	\$250,000,000

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Atlanta's existing infrastructure backlog is currently in excess of \$1 billion. In a response to the growing financial need to address infrastructure repairs and improvements, Mayor Kasim Reed, the Atlanta City Council, and the Departments of Public Works and Planning and Community Development issued a General Obligation Public Improvement Bond through a public bond referendum. The new GOB, named the Renew Atlanta Infrastructure 2015 Bond, was officially secured in March 2015 and will fund up to \$250 million in public improvement capital outlay projects. At the moment, the city's most pressing infrastructure challenges are to improve the roads, bridges, sidewalks, as well as to upgrade critical public buildings and facilities. Approximately \$188 million of the Renew Atlanta Infrastructure 2015 Bond will be used for public street and traffic control infrastructure and equipment; curbing; stormwater drainage; street name and directional signage; bridges; viaducts and related public improvement including but not limited to streetlights, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and transit stops.⁹ The remaining \$64 million will fund the acquisition, construction, renovation, and critical maintenance of municipal facilities and related public improvements.¹⁰ Projects were identified and assessed based on priorities by the Department of Public Works, city officials and departments, and the Atlanta City Council.

Mayor Kasim Reed and members of the Atlanta City Council have long advocated improving the City's infrastructure. The infrastructure projects will begin in Southwest Atlanta and

focus on projects to “build and repair bridges, fix roads and sidewalks, build more than 30 miles of new bicycle lanes, and synchronize traffic signals.”¹¹ The City of Atlanta’s website provides an interactive map and breakdown of the 229 proposed projects under the Renew Atlanta Infrastructure 2015 Bond. The resurfacing of Lynhurst Drive at Cascade Road SW—the first of the Renew Atlanta Infrastructure 2015 projects—began July 30, 2015. In order to maximize the bond’s impact, the Department of Public Works will leverage additional funds and coordinate with the Department of Watershed Management to improve drainage conditions along Lynhurst Drive and other roads in the city.

In December 2014, MARTA began operating the modernized Atlanta Streetcar, a single electric vehicle much like Denver’s Light Rail, powered by an overhead wire. The Atlanta Streetcar Project was a unique partnership of Atlanta’s political, business, and transit communities to create efficient and sustainable connectivity for city and region transit-dependent populations. The project cost a total of \$98 million, with the first \$47.6 million originating from the TIGER Grant program, and the remaining funds pooled together by the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Downtown Improvement District, Atlanta Regional Commission, and Luckie Street Two-Way Conversion project.¹³ The streetcar system was designed to complement local and regional transportation system expansions, and to connect east and west downtown Atlanta. Most importantly, the system was constructed in support of the City’s Connect Atlanta Plan to increase urban mobility, sustainable development, and livability.¹⁴ Phase 1 of the expansion offers last mile connectivity to MARTA, the BeltLine, and other transit options.¹⁵

Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC)

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency, as well as the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Atlanta metro area. ARC is one of the oldest MPOs in the nation, serving Atlanta and 18 surrounding counties. As a large-scale regional MPO, ARC requires a high level of interagency collaboration to fulfill their vision and service to communities. ARC provides regional leadership to local governments bridging and building working relationships and lasting partnerships. ARC is much larger than Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) and Salt Lake City’s Wasatch Front Regional Council. This level of scale poses challenges to strategic policy and program implementation.

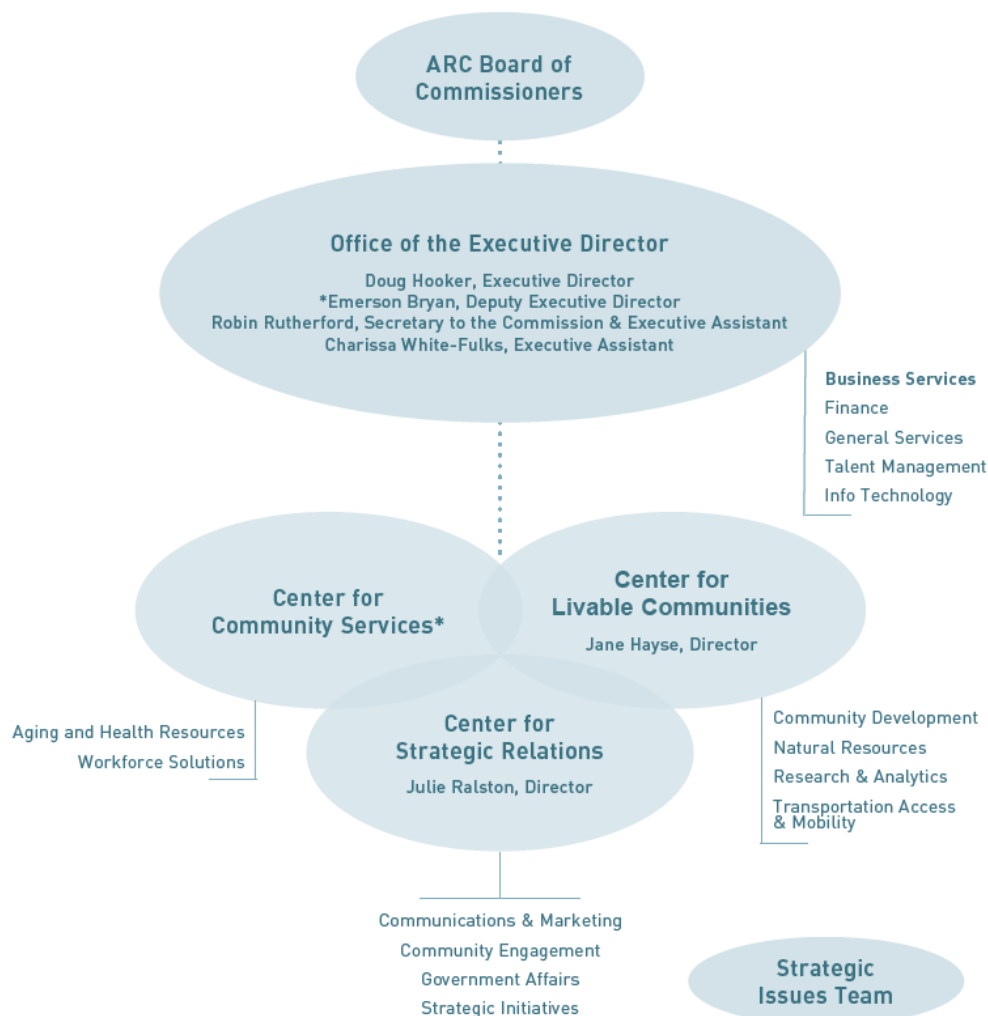
ARC is governed by its Board and the Office of the Executive Director, which manages the overall administrative operations, Board policy coordination, and business services. The ARC Board consists of 39 members, including 23 public officials from the respective counties and cities (county commission chairs and mayors), 15 citizen district members, and 1 non-voting representative from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. There are also a number of committees within the ARC: Aging Advisory, Aging and Health Resources Committee, Budget Audit Review, Strategic Relations Committee, Community Resources Committee, Land Use Coordinating, Transportation and Air Quality, Transportation Coordinating, and the Regional Transit Committee.

In 2012, Executive Director Doug Hooker created a more universal and evolved vision of the organization. Part of this strategy was the development of the Center for Community Services, Center of Livable Communities, and the Center for Strategic Relations. Prior to the ARC Evolution Strategy, these individual departments had limited cross-boundary collaboration. Figure 1.1 shows the ARC staff organization chart after the implementation of its evolution strategy.

ARC is addressing regional poverty through policies and equity performance measures in the regional plan. It also provides Equitable Target Areas analysis and workshops. The former Regional Poverty Committee was rebranded to form the new Poverty, Equity, and Opportunity Committee, which is a regular convening set of partners from policy organizations, regional entities, and funders. The committee is tasked with developing a strategic inventory of organizations working to address poverty in the region through policy development. The committee cultivates web-based tools and fact sheets that show key indicators related to poverty by county. Recently, the committee partnered with St. Vincent de Paul, an Atlanta-based community and social welfare nonprofit, to host an exhibit called Profiles of Poverty at Loudermilk Center. Future committee-led activities include a regional bus tour of Equitable Target Areas (ETA) and events to explore poverty-related issues. This information influences the ARC comprehensive planning process.

The Poverty, Equity, and Opportunity Committee currently hosts quarterly workshops targeting regional equity groups that are tied to suburban low-income and immigrant communities and communities of color. The workshops led to a 2015 summer and fall mobile work session, through which participants visit regional “pockets of poverty” to talk to school districts, service providers, and elected officials. The upcoming mobile work session will illustrate the DNA of the neediest communities and identify resources ARC could provide. ARC uses the workshops to better understand current community challenges, and strengthen the communities’ social fabrics.

FIGURE I.3: ARC Staff Organization



Source: <http://www.atlantaregional.com/about-us/overview/agency-structure>

The Community Resources Committee (CRC) is part of ARC’s Center for Livable Communities. CRC is tasked with overseeing the work program of ARC’s Community Development Division, Natural Resources Divisions, and Research and Analytics. The ARC Chairman appoints elected officials, nonprofit and community leaders, and private sector professionals to the CRC. The CRC provides guidance regarding the Regional Development Plan, Livable Center Initiative (LCI), Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) process, and more.

Other ARC leadership roles and responsibilities in addressing poverty include: TransFormation Alliance, Community Planning Academy, Transportation Equity Checklist, and Mobility Management services. The TransFormation Alliance Community Engagement Committee partnered with MARTA, the city government, and stakeholders to conduct listening sessions and charrettes at three key MARTA stations (Oakland City, King Center, H.E. Holmes) targeted for transit-oriented development (TOD) in historically underserved communities. The engagement

committee also developed a curriculum outline for the Equitable Development Academy to educate and engage residents near selected stations with an emphasis on recruiting vulnerable populations.

Livable Centers Initiative

The Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) is ARC’s unique competitive planning grant program. The land use planning grants are awarded to local governments and nonprofit organizations for TOD centers and corridors consistent with regional policies and plans. LCI also identifies transportation infrastructure projects for funding.¹⁶ The LCI program utilizes federal transportation dollars to fund 80 percent of proposed costs, while the grantee is required to secure a 20 percent funding match. To date, \$8.2 million has been spent to develop 112 LCI Master Plans in the Atlanta region’s 17 counties.¹⁷ The LCI studies are supported by supplemental studies.

LCI aims to provide communities with access to various modes of travel (including public transit, roadways, walking, and biking) and to cultivate outreach processes that involve all stakeholders. As of February 2015, ARC awarded \$800,000 to eight Atlanta communities to foster “quality growth and help develop innovative policies that support more vibrant, connected communities.”¹⁸ LCI has funded more than 106 projects, and virtually all have targeted bicycle, pedestrian, and transit enhancement programs. Sidewalks and street crossings are the predominant improvement areas.

As part of LCI, ARC created the Equitable Target Area (ETA) Index to address environmental justice issues in the region. ETAs are based on five demographic and socioeconomic parameters to facilitate project prioritization and evaluation, resource allocation, and regional and local decision-making. Equity challenges discovered through the ETA Index will be used to create performance measures that will, in turn, inform ARC’s funding decisions.

LCI applications use the ETA analysis and information to inform proposals and project submissions. ARC subsequently uses the ETA analysis, information, and applications to guide grantmaking decisions. As Figure 1.3 represents, many of the LCI projects are located in, or adjacent to, ETA communities from 2000 to 2010. A new ARC ETA map will be available by the end of the year, which will show new LCI projects in the ETA Index 14-17 range.

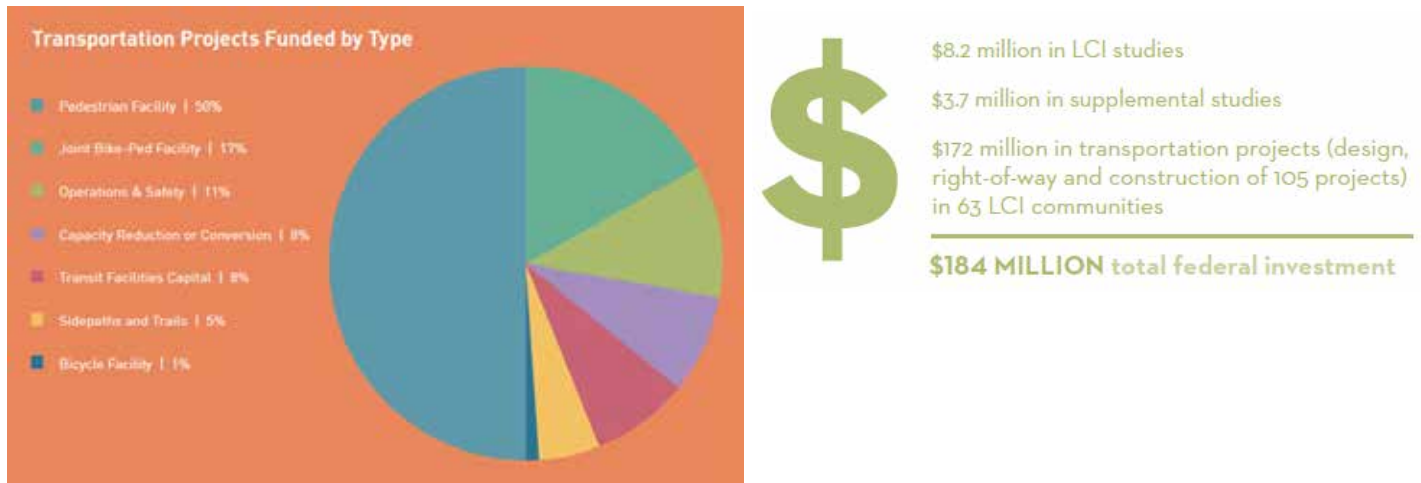
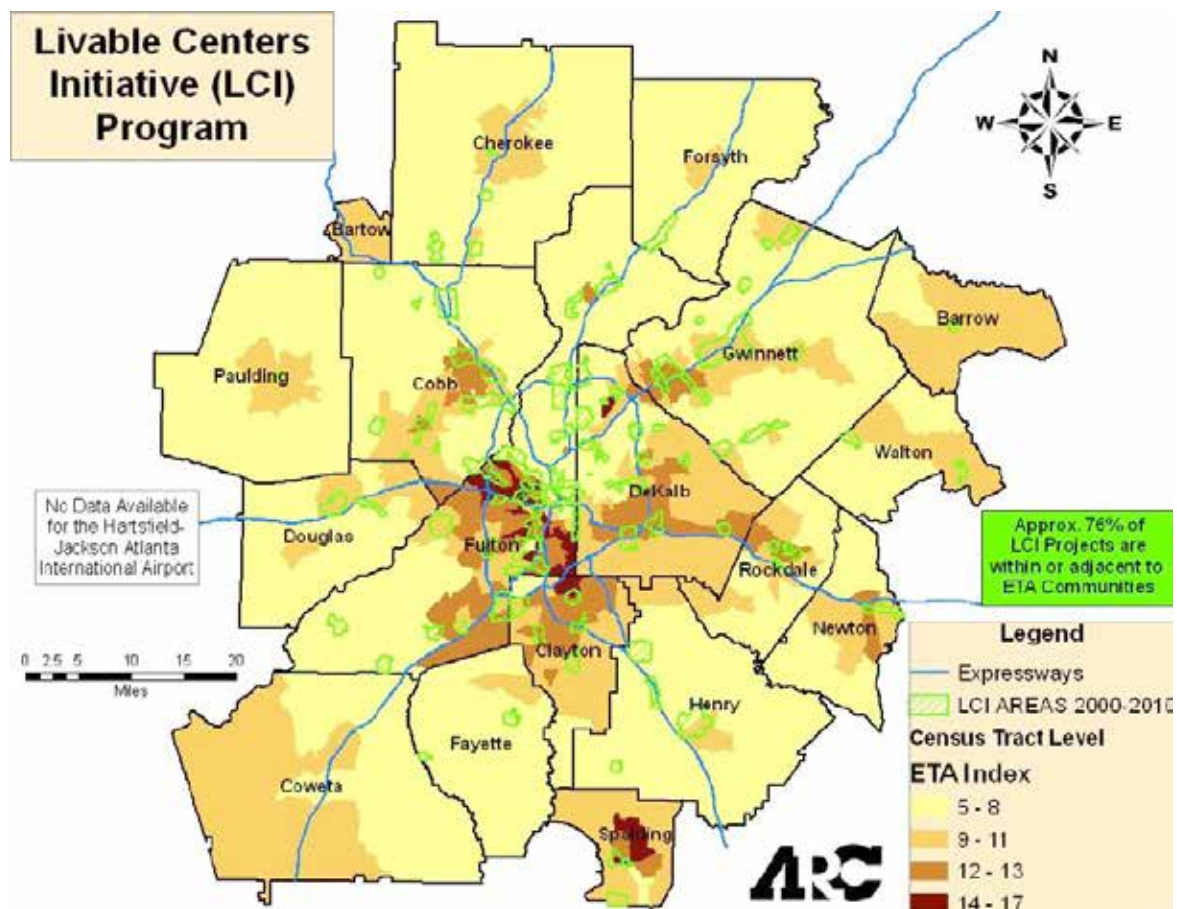


FIGURE 1.4:



Source: <http://www.atlantaregional.com/transportation/community-engagement/social-equity>

TransFormation Alliance

Patterned after Mile High Connects in Denver and other collaborative partnerships focused transit and equity, the TransFormation Alliance is a “partnership of nonprofits, developers, banks, transit providers and government agencies committed to forging innovative solutions that address issues of economic vitality, job creation, equity and opportunity within a framework of well-planned TOD.”¹⁹ It is framed by five key issues: people, transit, finance, job access, and housing choice. Alliance members include: Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), Enterprise Community Partners, Georgia STAND-UP, Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE), Urban Land Institute (ULI), Atlanta District Council, SUMMECH Community Development Corporation (SCDC), MARTA, Atlanta Land Trust Collaborative (ALTC), Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership, Inc. (ANDP), Fulton County/Atlanta Land Bank Authority (FCALBA), APD Solutions, Southface, Tapestry Development Group, and Wells Fargo Bank.²⁰ The TransFormation Alliance identifies and prioritizes stations with the greatest needs and opportunities to engage the community in the development process. Major emphasis has recently been placed on social equity and affordability in transit-oriented developments (TOD). Similar to Mile High Connects, much of the Transformation Alliance’s funding has come through the Ford Foundation. At the same time, the TransFormation Alliance cultivates innovative funding sources to integrate projects with transit.²¹

The alliance is responsible for the regional Equitable Transit Oriented Development (ETOD) movement. ETOD combines people- and place-based approaches to ensure that the value from land development near transit transfers to all nearby residents.²² The TransFormation Alliance educates, advocates for, and provides technical assistance to communities impacted by transit development. Current highlights for the TransFormation Alliance’s work include:

- **Policy Committee:** Currently co-led by the ARC and Enterprise Community Partners, the policy committee identifies and aligns policies and existing financial resources to increase affordable housing, retail services and commercial uses in mixed income developments integrated with transit.²³
- **Renew Atlanta Infrastructure 2015 Bond:** The Renew Atlanta Infrastructure 2015 project list is expected to be approved in fall 2015 by the Atlanta City Council. The Transformation Alliance will prioritize infrastructure projects that leverage the MARTA system.²⁴
- **Expanding MARTA into Clayton County:** Led by the Partnership for Southern Equity and Georgia STAND-UP, Clayton County passed a one-cent sales tax to bring MARTA back into the county after five years with no transit service. The Alliance and its partners will continue to engage Clayton County residents and elected leaders as they work with MARTA to expand transit service and capture economic benefits around planned transit stations.²⁵

Currently, 34 of 37 MARTA rail stations are in LCI areas, and have completed LCI studies that include plans for development and transportation infrastructure. After an LCI project is selected and implemented, the City of Atlanta and MARTA may apply for follow-up studies, zoning code work, or construction work with bicycle and pedestrian facilities through LCI. Over the years, the LCI has funded more than 20 projects around last mile connectivity funded at MARTA stations. ARC partners with MARTA in TOD activities in a number of ways. ARC takes guidance from local jurisdictions on the priorities to enhance regional community development. These projects may include sidewalks, bicycle lanes, or new bus stops.

The Atlanta Beltline

The Atlanta Beltline is the city’s most comprehensive transportation and economic development effort. The Beltline is a series of long-range sustainable redevelopment programs utilizing the city’s 22-mile historic rail corridor. Key highlights of the Atlanta Beltline include: 22 miles of pedestrian-friendly transit, 33 miles of multi-use trails, 1,300 acres of parks, 5,600 units of affordable housing, 1,100 acres of remediated brownfields, \$10 to 20 billion in economic development, 30,000 permanent jobs, 48,000 one-year construction jobs, and historic preservation.²⁶ Additionally, the project aims to connect 45 Atlanta neighborhoods. The Beltline transportation corridor connects downtown and midtown Atlanta through the MARTA system and additional transit from outlying suburban neighborhoods.²⁷ The Beltline represents a framework to navigate the region’s growth, predominately through transit-oriented development (TOD), expanding regional transit networks.

The Atlanta Beltline is a collaborative undertaking by the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Beltline Inc., and the Atlanta Beltline Partnership (nonprofit). MARTA, ARC, Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), and other partners and stakeholders are also involved. The Atlanta Beltline is a massive long-range capital investment that requires diverse funding sources. Adopted in 2013, the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) lays out a funding plan for the \$4.8 billion project through 2030 with a “mix of public and private sources—including the Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District (TAD); the City of Atlanta; private investment and philanthropic contributions; county, regional, state and federal grants; and public private partnerships.”²⁸ The SIP is divided into three funding implementation phases.

A critical portion of public funding comes from the Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District (TAD), which was created in 2004 by the Atlanta City Council. In 2005, the Fulton County Board of Commissioners and Atlanta Public Schools joined the City of Atlanta as investors in the Atlanta Beltline.

Leadership Landscape

The City of Atlanta, ARC, and MARTA are responsible for independently and collaboratively leading the region's developments of FLMC strategies, policies, and projects. The support from leadership for FLMC projects has remained constant, providing clearer prioritization context. The implementation of the Atlanta Streetcar and the build out of the BeltLine are major accomplishments that connect communities. Additionally, the City of Atlanta has worked closely with MARTA leadership to complete a variety of smaller capital projects. MARTA has prioritized FLMC projects and designs around stations they own, partially to increase ridership. MARTA is a strong proponent of TOD, and is aware of the connection between ridership volumes and the ease, efficiency, and quality of services. Also, MARTA has made a big push to provide technological services to streamline travel. Currently, the market supports high-density development at TOD stations in Atlanta. However, housing or transit affordability still remains a challenge even with MARTA's 20 percent housing affordability mandate. Lastly, ARC has increased their presence, roles, and responsibilities in regional equity issues. It is a unique characteristic of an MPO to develop such a diverse presence in the local and regional equity landscape.

Current Challenges to Low-income and Communities of Color

MARTA's 20 percent affordable housing allocation remains a challenge due to a recession-extended stronghold on traditional financing mechanisms. Often developers will meet the 20 percent affordable housing requirement for senior housing. Additionally, even with LCI's 80 percent funding for a specific project, low-income communities of color struggle to generate their 20 percent of the funds. As a result, LCI receives fewer applications. However, ARC can move funds from the Federal Highway pot to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) pot, which requires only a 10 percent funding match. Through LCI, this technically includes a soft match that includes any kind of design or right of way (ROW) donation that would count toward the 10 percent. Under explicit FTA matching, communities can only match with cash, ultimately limiting the involvement of low-income communities. Communities that can go through the LCI have a little financial leeway since the program can move funds and count additional project donations toward their FTA funding match.

Linking the Regional Plan

The ARC also has a partnership with the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE). The PSE handles the data around ARC's FLMC work and facilitates the strategy design for community discussions and planning activities. Most importantly, the PSE is responsible for understanding how community discussions relate back to successful and measurable ARC policies and strategies. The PSE also leads ARC's work on developing regional equity indicators similar to other major U.S. cities. The PSE has provided ARC with the Metro Atlanta Equity Atlas (MAEA), however it is not a live, interactive GIS-based map.

The TransFormation Alliance has a Community Engagement Committee that organizes around specific stations with transit and economic opportunity in low-income areas. Currently, The TransFormation Alliance is building a new TOD academy with a curriculum that prepares citizens to participate in the conversation about development. For example, In Root, a new arts initiative, partnered with WonderRoot to create four word-based murals at transit stations. As part of this initiative, WonderRoot provides a six-month community engagement and outreach process.

All regional stations targeted by ARC are owned and operated by MARTA. Melissa Roberts, community engagement coordinator with ARC, explained that the TransFormation Alliance complements MARTA by assisting its 20 percent affordable housing goal through funding and other mechanisms. In tandem, both organizations work with communities to understand needs (services, jobs, housing etc.). One new project is an equity evaluator tool used for any development that comes into a station area to determine its potential benefits. This internal tool uses scoring criteria to identify a suitable project. As a collaborative measure, MARTA is building the equity evaluator tool into the request for proposals (RFP) process. The Alliance is working with developers to understand and use the equity evaluator tool and providing an incentives package.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

- **Equity and Poverty Committee:** The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) should develop a committee to cultivate and track regional work on poverty and equity. This would broaden and strengthen relationships and partnerships with local jurisdictions, nonprofits, and community-based organizations. Moving forward, conversations about MetroVision should emphasize the importance of regional equity. Additionally, this committee would provide vital public resources around planned projects, developments, and advocacy throughout the region.
- **Parking and TOD:** The Regional Transportation District (RTD) and DRCOG should analyze current and future land use around stations, and assess the valuations of turning parking into affordable housing or enhanced community station areas. The August 2015 MetroVision workshop was set to discuss new ideas and current issues around parking and TOD. Part of this discussion was to focus on establishing a working group for parking issues.
- **Future Bond Program:** The future Better Denver Bond Program for capital projects and investments should have an explicit emphasis on FLMC strategies and policies and transit-supportive infrastructure.
- **Develop Integrated New Leadership:** With the departure of Phillip Washington, and the relatively new appointment of Dave Genova as General Manager for Denver's RTD, leadership needs to continue expanding its public outreach and engagement. A unique asset of the Atlanta region comes from MARTA CEO Keith Parker. He works with local jurisdictions and ARC, and is well respected for his public engagement around transit.
- **Leverage The Regional Equity Atlas to Develop Equitable Target Areas:** The current DRCOG and Mile High Connects (MHC) Regional Equity Atlas is a useful public resource for targeting areas of need and low-income communities. We recommend taking the Regional Equity Atlas to define specific Equitable Target Areas. Defining and working within established ETAs will help decision and policymaking moving forward with the prioritization of equitable projects. Part of this recommendation requires support for various organizations and stakeholders working on equity issues, like MHC. MHC can help drive the conversation.
- **Develop a funding model comparable to the Livable Center Initiative (LCI):** DRCOG has a program to fund studies to look at land use and housing infrastructure issues around transit and activity centers. However, what is missing is a set aside pot of funds to apply to improvements in these areas. LCI recognizes regional importance for areas and provides infrastructure support for projects.

CONCLUSION

The Atlanta region has come back from the brink of a first generation transit agency bankruptcy to become nationally respected for FLMC enhancements. Atlanta's collaboration around projects that focus on equity is unique. ARC remains a driving force for equity. Similarly, the City of Atlanta has prioritized the implementation of FLMC infrastructure projects inclusive of low-income communities and populations. Lastly, MARTA, the City of Atlanta, and ARC's dynamic leadership are engaged in foundational collaborations to improve ridership, the transit experience, and connectivity. Atlanta's standout projects are the BeltLine and ARC's LCI, which includes Equitable Target Areas to geographically prioritize equity-based initiatives in the region. The TransFormation Alliance and the Poverty, Equity, and Opportunity Committee are two of the strongest regional collaborations working on FLMC projects and policies.

The advancements in the Atlanta region are impressive. However, there is still much to be done to reach equitable transit solutions. Atlanta's socioeconomic disparities remain strong and the city is still a single vehicle car-centric urban center. Atlanta will remain a city to follow as funding challenges prove to be all too cyclical and common. Atlanta's transformation from the national center of suburbanized sprawl is—one hopes—only just beginning.

(ENDNOTES)

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