

# CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND THE CITIZEN'S VIEWPOINT

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In the 50s and 60s Atlanta became a city of regional and national importance. A strong business economy, a building boom in the central business district (mostly offices, hotels, and convention facilities), the development of the second busiest airport in the United States, and increased access to the central city via 5 limited-access freeways are all cited even now in Atlanta as major indexes of progress. Obviously, those achievements were not without cost.

Primarily because of transportation and airport systems and other public actions, we lost a great deal of our housing stock. We experienced a great deal of neighborhood disruption and dispersal of residents. Other public decisions facilitated white migration to the suburbs and thereby undermined the city's fiscal condition.

In the midst of these developments, whether they are termed progress or otherwise, citizens have increasingly begun to question the growth-serving goals to which the private and public sector seem committed. A coalition of neighborhood groups and individual community organizations are increasingly advancing the goal of improving the quality of life by preserving and upgrading neighborhoods. The citizens are saying that that goal is as important a planning parameter as is the goal of facilitating regional growth through serving the needs of the CBD and making it easily accessible by automobile.

These kinds of different goal formulations have resulted in what I see as the development of two very strong interest groups in the city. One is the Chamber of Commerce, which has been responsible for a very vibrant business economy, a growth spurt in the CBD. Its goals have tended to revolve around business prosperity and have included maximizing automobile access downtown. The other is an interest group that I would characterize as residential-community oriented. It feels that these kinds of growth- and business-serving goals are diametrically opposed to its own goals for preservation of neighborhoods.

Whenever we talk about community groups and citizen participation, immediately the question of representativeness arises. I would like to underscore my own conclusion that transportation is a major issue in Atlanta by saying that in 1970 a branch of the Georgia State University conducted a study on citizen attitudes toward public policies in Atlanta. The study found that Atlanta respondents used public transportation more

than citizens of all but 2 other cities in the 9-city comparison study. Sixty-two percent of the respondents felt the city should devote efforts toward improving public transportation rather than making it easier to drive a car.

Let me turn to a sort of a brief historical sketch of the transportation planning process in Atlanta. The process historically has been fragmented among a number of operating and planning agencies. Some portions of our present transportation plan were formulated in the 1940s.

There was a series of different studies since the 1940s that were brought together in 1962 in the Atlanta Area Transportation Study (AATS). The staff of that study consisted of the state highway department and the Atlanta Metropolitan Region Planning Commission that had contributed staff from various local governments, but no one agency was responsible for the total planning effort.

The data for AATS were gathered, analyzed, completed, and approved by the end of the 1960s, that is, before our rapid transit referendum passed in 1971. Before completion of this study and based on the prior studies that culminated in the 1968 AAT study, the Atlanta area had built 5 Interstate freeways and 1 limited-access state freeway that traversed the city and occupied 48 miles and approximately 3,000 acres.

The 5 major new expressways projected by AATS included 3 extensions of existing expressways and will increase both the mileage and the acreage devoted to the urban expressways by more than 50 percent. It is this outlook of doubling urban expressways—and taking them right to the central business district—that greatly increased opposition to the new freeways.

This opposition was also facilitated by a series of significant developments. In 1971 the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) referendum was passed. That gave us 64 miles of rail and busway to be completed in about a 10-year period. Immediately after MARTA acquired the privately owned bus system, the bus fare was changed from 40 to 15 cents and patronage increased 27 percent or 9 million rides.

Immediately citizen groups claimed for the first time rapid transit was a viable option. A rapid transit referendum had previously been defeated; and, even though transit was included in the 1968 AATS plan, it was a secondary system to accommodate the overflow from the freeway system. We are paying for this with a 1-cent sales tax. We ought to experience some relief from preoccupation with freeways in that MARTA system.

Another significant event in 1971 was that one very organized and articulate community group hired a lawyer, who obtained a court injunction against further land acquisition along Interstate 45 pending completion of an environmental impact statement. The absence of the statement led to the injunction, but the 2-hearing process had been completed. A great deal of money had been invested, and a lot of land had been acquired for the route.

The significance of that road, and the only reason I mention it, is that it is the key to the system. If it is not built, the pieces that it connects cannot be built. The environmental impact study is under federal review now, so we do not have the results of that. The lawyers are at hand.

Another significant event was the creation in 1972 of the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), which assumed responsibility for comprehensive transportation planning involving coordination among ARC, MARTA, and the Georgia Department of Transportation.

For the first time the locus of planning was shifted from the Georgia Department of Transportation to regional commissions. There was better coordinated planning for the first time. MARTA was participating as an active agency rather than as a gleam in somebody's eye. The existence of ARC and the funding that came to it to do the transportation planning were cited by many citizens' groups as a reason to do a major updating review of the AATS plan because that plan, which had been very long in the making anyway, preceded both MARTA and ARC.

The development of MARTA and ARC obviously was viewed optimistically by the opponents of the freeway system. Those same opponents suffered a defeat in 1972 when a state toll authority was voted in by the Georgia legislature and three of the projected freeways were designated as toll roads. The federal money was not coming fast enough,

it was felt. There was a need, because of increasing citizen opposition, to complete the freeway system and for that reason, as well as others, certain freeways were designated toll roads. The problem of the toll road authority act to citizens' groups is that there are no provisions in that act to force compliance with federal guidelines for either environmental protection or relocation assistance.

A fragmented but widespread citizen group called the Atlanta Coalition on the Transportation Crisis was created partly to oppose toll road legislation, but also to try to raise the whole question of transportation planning and citizens' participation in that planning to the level of political dialogue and debate.

I would like to describe the constituent groups of that organization because I have heard a lot about the fact that citizens' groups participating in transportation planning had been weighted toward disadvantaged or minority groups. This is not true in Atlanta. One of the things that worried me in working with the organization or a coalition of transportation groups was that we started out as a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood coalition. We had a tendency to compete with other neighborhoods to see who would get the urban renewal highway. Because I live in a deteriorating neighborhood, I care about that kind of parochialism among citizen groups. It is certainly in existence, and it is negative.

In the transportation coalition, we received help from professional planners. Many planners live in the neighborhoods of Atlanta, and we even got assistance from planning staffs of the city and of agencies that would usually be considered to be highway oriented.

In our membership, we also have environmental organizations and their members. One of the interesting things to me about the coalition is that it is not predominantly identifiable as a conservation group, i. e., a group concerned with wilderness preservation or with conservation of natural resources. Many people in the organization are, of course, concerned with those things, but primarily we are talking about the quality of urban life.

Some activities and accomplishments of the coalition have been that they have raised money and hired a lawyer to explore the legal basis for a class action suit against the toll road authority or against the entire freeway system as proposed by AATS. The coalition (I suppose this is an accomplishment) was instrumental in my appointment to the Board of Aldermen early in 1972. I in turn was instrumental in passage by the Board of Aldermen of a resolution that stated for the first time the city's own goals. Heretofore, the city had simply rubber-stamped the comprehensive transportation plan document that came to it, but had not injected any of its goals into that plan. The resolution was the first policy statement from the city. It was sent to ARC with the request that the commission do a comprehensive review and update the old AATS plan and include in that review the goals of changing the modal split and of emphasizing for the first time rapid transit over freeways as a desired mode of transportation for the inner city. One of the goals was to explore the substitutability of rapid transit lines for currently proposed new freeway lines and to consider no additional freeways in the area.

The other important accomplishment of the coalition was to obtain a decision to stop construction of the Stone Mountain toll road. I am going to use that particular road as sort of a case study to show the kind of power struggle that goes on as I see it between a state transportation department and citizen groups.

The Stone Mountain toll road is the east-west leg of the system. The rest of the system does not particularly depend on it; it simply goes into that part of the system that is radial. In 1968 we had the first location hearing on the Stone Mountain project. The facility was originally designated a freeway and received that designation after the toll authority was passed. Construction was halted after that first location hearing pending completion of an environmental impact statement, which evaluated 3 alternate routes. When the transportation department presented the results of the environmental impact statement, our position was one of opposition (I will not go into what that opposition was based on, for I am sure you are familiar with it.)

The significant thing is that the staff of the transportation department and the director of the toll road authority communicated with the governor that they were unable to make a recommendation about which of the routes would be the best one for the Stone Mountain toll road. Based on their own recommendation, the governor then created a

governor's commission on the Stone Mountain toll road and committed himself to be bound by its decision as to whether to build the road. The transportation department also committed itself to that decision.

I was a member of that commission, so I am aware of the basis on which it made its recommendations. We went through the usual hearings, and we studied all available documents (there were tons of those). Some new information emerged that may have influenced our decision more than all of those documents: By using the transportation department's own estimates, we found that two-thirds of the automobile trips that were to originate within the corridor had destinations in the central area. We also found that approximately 15 percent of the projected traffic would occur during peak hours. What was compelling to us was that the corridor, by the department's own estimates, was to largely serve trips of people who lived within the corridor and that these were the very people who literally, 99 to 1, were opposing the road. That opposition was representative, we felt, because there were so many hearings held and there were so many attempts made to bring groups out and elicit their pros and cons.

We reached the conclusion that a large percentage of the peak-hour commuter trips could be served best by rapid transit, and we were also persuaded that rapid transit was a preferable mode of transportation because it already existed in the same corridor; that is to say, a rapid transit busway was planned and had gone into operation by the time the governor's commission made its report.

The chief planner stated that the busway could accommodate a substantial amount of excess capacity in the absence of a freeway. It became clear that the busway project would operate under capacity because of competition from the toll road, and nobody had ever considered what would happen if a rail line were substituted for that rapid busway. That, in fact, is what was agreed on as the best mode for handling trips to the central business district.

There was no question but that the decision of the governor's commission not to build the Stone Mountain toll road resulted in some trip suppression. The consideration was, however, that suppressing some automobile trips was worthwhile in the interest of allowing MARTA to function so that its capacity could be determined. The freeway could then handle the overflow, if any.

We were not opposing the freeway for all time. We were saying, "Let's reverse the priority of mode and give MARTA a chance to operate to absolute capacity. If somebody can then demonstrate a need for the freeway, fine! Let them!"

The governor's commission did report back in December, recommending against building the Stone Mountain freeway. The governor committed himself to that conclusion as did the director of the transportation department.

In January, the transportation board voted not to build that toll road and immediately instructed its staff to design a transportation alternative that was to be like a parkway. The staff was given no land use alternative other than for traffic use.

The staff came up with the most major traffic reuse, a facility just under the level of a limited-access expressway. The total corridor was to be used, a proposal that exactly paralleled the Stone Mountain proposal. It simply was a parkway. It was not so large a road as the toll road. It would not serve the same capacity, but the environmental impact had not been established. The staff of the transportation department was instructed to solicit the opinions of interested citizen groups and affected jurisdictions, but obviously they were soliciting reactions not to a range of alternatives for the land use there but to a plan they had been told to proceed with, which is my whole objection to the way the department operates.

They then went one at a time to ARC, and, though the acquired right-of-way was in my ward, it was interesting to me that they talked to me and my community only at my request. We heard that they were soliciting citizen opinions from other organizations.

I have to say again that in Georgia there is enormous cynicism about the value or desirability of qualifications of citizens to have any input into transportation planning processes. The transportation department is eager for us to participate in a dialogue over routes, but any sort of goal setting is something that I think they would consider an inappropriate input for citizens to have.

The Board of Aldermen passed unanimously a resolution mandating the city planning department to coordinate the planning for reuse of the Stone Mountain toll road right-of-way and to examine all alternatives advocated by different citizen groups and interested organizations. The city planning department has done that and has recommended against any traffic reuse in that corridor. The governor's commission has had to restate its intentions, which were obviously against a major traffic use in the corridor.

We did not even deal with toll financing, so when the Georgia Department of Transportation says that what we turned down was a toll road but not a parkway—well, it can be called by any number of names! The governor's commission has had to reiterate that its position was against a major traffic artery competing with MARTA. We wanted MARTA to be tested to capacity.

Today the city planning department has issued a report on alternative reuses for that land. The thing that concerns me, of course, is that final decision as to whether or not a highway will be constructed in the Stone Mountain corridor rests with the transportation department, which owns the land.

My own position (although obviously a very biased position in favor of community group inputs) has been not that there should be no further toll roads or expressways built in Atlanta or that there should be no more street improvements. I was very impressed by the statement of the director of the transportation department when the commission brought back its recommendation not to build the Stone Mountain toll road. He said, "You know, I can live with that, but the precedent being set for community groups is that they will oppose any further construction of not only limited-access roads but also street widening. They will be against any automobile-serving road construction." I did not agree with that position. There are people who feel that way; I do not, however.

At that point, I committed myself to exploring with the citizens' group with which I work most closely in my own community to determine what sort of traffic improvements would be palatable. We had to do that in the context of the coalition because we recognized that what is good for one community may be harmful to others.

Several community groups were able to agree that there was in fact a corridor that could be widened to serve some of the automobile travel that would have been served by the Stone Mountain toll road had it been built. This corridor paralleled the MARTA rail rapid line to be constructed. The road would be constructed in conjunction with the MARTA line, would not split existing communities, and would not interfere with any housing. It was to be built in a corridor where deterioration had occurred and where those in the community most directly affected felt it would be a positive benefit. So I thought that that kind of citizen consideration of acceptable transportation modes other than rapid transit was a sign that we were not just obstructionists, which is often what we are accused of being.

Other aldermen and I went to the Georgia transportation department and advocated that this road be considered. It was endorsed by the Board of Aldermen, the city and regional commissions, the county planning department, all affected jurisdictions, and all citizens' groups. The response of the transportation department was that they would proceed with the engineering on the road. However, the major planning groups were astounded when the department did not fund the preliminary engineering at a level that they did on all other freeways.

I do not think that the outlook for change through the incorporation of citizen input into goal formulation and system planning is good. I think that the transportation department has demonstrated a rigidity and inflexibility in reexamining or updating old plans. It has continually verbalized a contempt for citizen groups and a desire to limit their participation to choices of limited-access expressways. I feel that the department is also insensitive to the need to support street improvements and highway projects that are determined by local governments as having beneficial community impact. The department, I feel, should be more willing to implement policies made by public officials rather than to make policy. I also feel that the Atlanta Regional Commission is too new, lacks the confidence or will, and is also too dependent on the Georgia Department of Transportation for a certain amount of its funding of the comprehensive transportation planning process. It therefore appears that legal action and political process represent the best avenue for the injection of citizen values into the planning process at this time.

There are several ways, I think, to improve the transportation planning process. First, impact study procedures should be expanded to include total community impact and ameliorated procedures. Such studies would be broader than limited environmental impact statements and should be conducted before a project has been established and the decision limited to a choice between discreet alternatives. Second, the regional commission, rather than the transportation department, should be responsible for impact studies. In the impact studies, more serious consideration should be given to the alternatives or to the substitutability of rapid transit for new expressways. Third, representative citizen participation should be built into the formal study process at its outset.

## INFORMAL DISCUSSION

**TORREY:** Will you restate the point you made on community impact work? Are you saying that the community context for transportation improvements must be in terms of not only the facilities that the community wants but also the way that decisions are made with the community?

**BRADLEY:** Yes. I want the impact study procedures expanded to include total community impact and ameliorative procedures, and I will give an example. My community has 3 expressways and an interchange planned for it, but the impact study will evaluate one road at a time. The community will cease to exist if all those roads are put through, but no examination is made of the total impact on the community of all the programmed roads. Neither is enough attention given to social considerations such as impact on housing stock. We have put greater concern on environmental implications such as removal of park land.

**KISH:** Does your regional planning commission have an advisory board of citizens?

**BRADLEY:** There has been a citizens' advisory board, but the problem has been that it could not initiate action but only respond at the request of regional commission staffers to questions put to it. Also it had to filter its recommendations up through ARC staff, who would take the recommendations to the people who made the final decision. The people who were involved in the transportation advisory committee of ARC were very much disillusioned. They felt it was a futile experience. There is no understanding of a need to update that plan in a way that would alter the system. I keep hearing that what the federal government has approved is a continuous plan, and a continuous plan means that, once adopted, it is not changed. Now that is really out of touch with what citizen groups are saying!

**KISH:** How is input of the citizens provided to the regional planning commission?

**TAYLOR:** As a representative of the Atlanta Coalition on the Transportation Crisis, I say the citizens' advisory board is defunct. The people have stopped going, and the staff discouraged its existence and never had any meetings. The necessity for it is now realized, for there is a problem in getting a new plan, which is not yet in effect. The approach is going to be to nominate all the organizations to be represented.

**CARSON:** We have spent hours in workshops discussing at what point citizens can function most effectively in transportation planning. I now have the idea from you that they are not very useful at a certain point. At what point are citizens useful?

**BRADLEY:** My point really was that citizens were not allowed to be useful. I have been impressed by the level of sophistication of the citizens' group that started out as sort of a parochial "take somebody else's neighborhood, not mine" attitude. In their presentations during the past few months, they have talked about a system and a modal split and basic planning parameters and policies that are reflected in those kinds of decisions. I think citizen input is valuable when citizens are allowed to participate in setting goals and in the initial stages of the planning process. They will only be allowed to do that when the old transportation system plans cannot be implemented. Then somebody will have to go out and bring in the citizens. My training is in community organi-

zations. I keep waiting for the major establishment to co-opt us, and they do not want to yet, which means that we are not perceived as being powerful enough. That has to happen politically. When that does, there will be attempts to get to us.

CARSON: When goals are set, do you relate that to the adoption of the budget?

BRADLEY: Yes. I think what the communities are saying is that their goals should be reflected in the planning process and should compete with other alternatives for public investments. I am not saying those goals should control policy-making. I am saying that they should compete and that the elected officials should come to grips with the hard policy decisions.

CARSON: Why should they not control policy-making? They are set by the people who are going to pay for the implementation of the plan that is determined by the policy.

BRADLEY: The chamber of commerce also pays and happens to be another interest group that is a legitimate interest group; but I do not want it to take over the policy-making. I do not think any interest group should make policy for a city. Each has to compete, and the elected officials have to make the policy decisions. I know of no more democratic way to do it.

CAMPBELL: You say that the Georgia Department of Transportation was not interested in letting citizens participate in a meaningful way. Has MARTA shown citizens the different alternatives for rapid transit and busways and schedules and been completely open and free in adjusting its facilities?

BRADLEY: Not at all. I have to qualify that by saying that MARTA failed the first referendum and barely succeeded in the second. It is on pins and needles in terms of its own problems with housing relocation now that U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development money is cut back. It is also dependent to an extent on the state transportation department's control over a certain amount of federal money. It is so afraid to cross the transportation department that it communicated (I suppose to our congressmen) that it did not want or really need the Highway Trust Fund to be "busted." The citizens have tried to be allies of MARTA, but it considers us dangerous. I think they think we are going to zap everything.

McMANUS: Should a metropolitan area such as yours have an elected board making decisions on both highways and transit for the metropolitan area?

BRADLEY: No, because we have an elected board of the regional commission who is doing that.

McMANUS: Why can't they resolve those disputes?

BRADLEY: I tried to indicate that the highway planning process is years old and the highway system that generated it was decided on in 1968. Rapid transit was voted in in 1971, after the fact. ARC was activated in 1972, after the fact. A lot has happened during the past 3 years. The new authorities and the commission have problems with taking over completely from a department that historically has done the major transportation planning in Georgia.