

Planning Metropolitan Atlanta?
The Atlanta Regional Commission, 1970-2002

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Abstract

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Though their history dates back to the middle of the 20th century, public regional planning agencies in the United States frequently are characterized as weak and disorganized. Sprawling development is cited as concrete evidence of the failure of regional planning agencies to develop and implement a coordinated agenda. Atlanta is often mentioned as a prime example of this phenomenon. As a result, regional planning agencies have received comparatively little scholarly attention for their role in metropolitan development. While much of the everyday work these agencies do has been hidden from public view, their work has nevertheless shaped the metropolitan landscape.

To support this notion, I asked three questions related to the work of Atlanta's public regional planning agency, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). First, when and through what channels did ARC coordinate planning and development activity? Second, how did ARC lend support to the processes behind metropolitan

decentralization? Third, what role did ARC play in the expansion of federal and state power over local land development decisions?

To understand how Atlanta's regional planning agency operated at this nexus of fractious local, state, and federal politics, we must turn our attention away from mechanical indicators and toward more subtle issues of procedure. Drawing from a body of archival sources, I examine a historical series of events: the conditions surrounding the formation of the planning agency in 1971; the writing of a 1975 regional development plan; the coordination of a regional watershed management process in 1980; the genesis of the 1989 state law that mandated local comprehensive planning; and the pitched battle over air quality and the building of a suburban freeway in 1999.

Focusing on the work of the Commission reveals how administrative capacity, consistent state support, and a regionalist legacy influenced which issues would receive attention, how responses to those issues would be crafted, and the character of the development that would result. Examining the work of a single agency over time permits a detailed view of how the regional planning process unfolds and the role that regional planning organizations like ARC have played in building a sprawling nation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

Though possessing a history dating to the early 20th century, regional planning agencies in the United States have frequently been characterized as weak and disorganized. Vast sprawling suburbs are often cited as concrete evidence of the failure of the nation's regional planning agencies to develop and implement coordinated regional development agendas. Seemingly fractured by the spillover effects and negative externalities of unregulated development and uncoordinated local behavior, Atlanta is often mentioned as a prime example of this phenomenon. Addressing the issue in a 1994 lecture before members of the Urban Land Institute's Atlanta chapter, the eminent urban economist Anthony Downs remarked, "unlimited low-density metropolitan growth takes place through an uncoordinated, seemingly almost random set of local public policies and individual private actions carried out by separate governments and private parties."¹ And so goes the prevailing wisdom about the causes and conditions of sprawl and its relationship to regional planning: if only coordination were better, sprawl would be less.

Perhaps as a result of such thinking, the planning agencies ostensibly in charge of regional coordination have received comparatively little attention for their role in metropolitan growth and restructuring over the last fifty years. But paying attention to

how ideas and information about regional planning issues are generated and disseminated and through what paths policies are interjected into the world suggests that regional planning agencies have been much more centrally involved in the development decision making process than previously acknowledged. Even a cursory glance at the public record reveals the influence of regional agencies and the policies they champion in the way debates about development have been framed, in the way planning technologies have been used (e.g. maps and population projections), and in the identities of the organizations and individuals that were able to participate.

While Downs succinctly distills the dominant perspective on the function and performance of regional planning agencies, his comments summarily overlook much of the planning and coordination that regional agencies actually accomplished. Which is not to say that he is wrong. Often, disconnect appears between local development patterns and regional policies (in many cases a real disconnect). But this does not mean that the work regional agencies do is not important to how and why an urban region grows in a particular way, or even why local decisions and regional policies don't always line up. Regional planning agencies have played a particularly key role in the processes that have shaped the physical form of seemingly unplanned urban regions like Atlanta.

To support this contention, I investigate four questions related to the work of Atlanta's regional planning agency, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). First, when and through what channels did ARC coordinate planning and development activity? Second, how has ARC supported the processes behind metropolitan decentralization? Third, what role has ARC played in the expansion of federal and state power over local land development decisions? Fourth, is the existing framework for

characterizing and evaluating ARC (and agencies like it) out of step with the way it actually works? All four questions concern how the agency managed to coordinate regional policies across political boundaries and the role it played in building metropolitan Atlanta's sprawling landscape.

To understand how Atlanta's regional planning agency functioned, sitting at the nexus of fractious local, state, and federal politics, we must turn our attention away from simple mechanical indicators and toward language and procedure (discourse) and the rules that govern the behavior of public agencies (structure). Paying close attention to the discourse that is part of the work of regional planning agencies, during meetings, hearings, reports, special studies, maps, and media, is one way of seeing how the process unfolds from the inside. Training a tighter lens on the organization of the regional agencies themselves helps us understand how the structure of an agency (jurisdiction, funding, composition, and controls) establishes the kinds of development issues that receive attention, and how responses to those issues can be crafted. Together, discourse and structure can exert significant influence over the milieu in which development decisions are made, yet are not visible in the easily measurable metrics that planning researchers often seek.

Most studies of regional planning have focused on the fate of policies directed at controlling specific development externalities associated with the activities of neighboring municipal governments. Success (or failure) is measured by whether or not regional policies are adopted and carried out by local jurisdictions within a relatively short time frame.² But taking a longer view challenges such evaluations. By looking across several decades, I build an argument in support of ARC's influence of on the

shape of Atlanta's built environment. Toward this end, my dissertation reconstructs the cumulative work of ARC during the period between 1971 and 2002, the years in which Atlanta grew from an important but relatively small southern city to a vast global metropolis. Using a variety of archival sources related to the work of the Atlanta Regional Commission, I will examine, in order, the creation of the regional agency (1971); the preparation of a regional development plan (1975); a regional watershed management planning process (1980); the passage of a state law that mandated comprehensive planning (1989); and a battle over air quality, transportation planning, and the building of a suburban freeway (1999-2001). The written record of the planning process that supported the expansion of Atlanta's built environment provides an inside view of the relationship between the professional bureaucracy and political officials that helped structure the pattern of development decision-making. Thus the case of metropolitan Atlanta in the post-1970 period provides an opportunity to focus in depth on the role of a single regional planning agency in the transformation of an American city into a major metropolis during the last third of the 20th century.³

Writing regional history necessarily emerges from a theoretical perspective. In the case of Atlanta, much has been made of the socio-economic and political forces that have conditioned the development of the region, and most of the scholarship that takes post-war Atlanta as a case has come from one of three theoretical frames: regime theory, race, and political economy. While it is possible to think of these frames as competing explanations, more often than not they blend together in scholarly narrative. Regime theory, as expounded by Clarence Stone's classic case study of Atlanta, argues that city development has been determined by a set of loose but consistent relationships between

downtown corporate leaders and key elected officials, relationships that have consistently worked to enhance the economic value of the interests of members of the regime, but have also made controlling the city's large, and largely poor, black population a preoccupation, using planning and development as tools to achieve this end. Stone uses this lens to explain the unusual geography of processes like urban renewal.⁴

Race alone has been cited, most prominently by Ronald Bayer (and recently by Kevin Kruse), as the critical factor in both the growth and subsequent decentralization of Atlanta and the rise of its early post-War suburbs, and one of several determining factors in explaining the shape of the city's physical landscape, from the location of freeways and transit to the kinds of jobs in suburban office parks.⁵ A geographically sensitive version of Marxian political economy, based in the work of David Harvey, has produced a few efforts to explain Atlanta's form as an expression of the growth machine and the spatial demands of advanced capitalism. In this scheme, flows of capital, and the self-interest of the individuals and organizations responsible for managing capital, have been in part diverted in the built environment, a complicated process that dictated the shape of urban development from afar.⁶

Together, regime, race, and political economy offer good explanations of development within the city of Atlanta itself, and to some extent the region as well, echoing issues and conflicts documented in other places.⁷ Yet, restricting attention to race and capital comes at the expense of overlooking other metropolitan issues, particularly the large public institutions that gradually engaged the task of planning the region's development after the Second World War. Ignoring the intricate relationships that developed between federal, state, and local governments during this period, which both

supported and pushed the demographic and economic changes that emerged within urban areas, hides the role of public bureaucracies (like ARC) in the transformation of central cities into metropolitan regions. Though the day-to-day operations of public regional planning agencies remain somewhat ineffable and remarkably complex, none of the major existing literatures addresses the influence or importance of this work in detail. Hence while respecting the insights developed in the regime theory, race, and political economy literatures, I will explore the evolution of Atlanta's metropolitan landscape from the perspective of an old, stable, publicly-financed regional planning agency.

The Regionalist Legacy

Upon its founding, the Atlanta Regional Commission inherited a long legacy of regionalist activity. Ideas about the advantages of creating regional plans to achieve urban deconcentration were widely circulated beginning in the late 19th century, ideas that influenced several generations of planners, architects, and civil engineers who went on to form the intellectual base from which planning spread its ideas and intellectual capital over succeeding decades.⁸ Organized efforts to produce formal regional development plans in the United States date to the 1920s.⁹ One of the first, and certainly the most famous, was the Plan of New York, a ten volume, ten-year project funded by the Russell Sage Foundation that began in 1921 and included some of the most renowned planners and social scientists in the English-speaking world.¹⁰ What began as a one-off project (though with a horizon of 30 years) evolved into the Regional Plan Association (RPA) of New York, a permanent, non-profit planning organization that continues to

produce plans for and issue reports about the New York metropolitan area on a periodic basis.

Around the same time, the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), a loose intellectual organization founded in 1923 by Lewis Mumford, Benton Mackaye, and a handful of other prominent planners, also appeared. Self-described intellectual descendents of Patrick Geddes, the Scottish denizen of Edinburgh's camera obscura and proponent of a quasi-scientific form of regional analysis, the RPAA advocated through writings and plans and lectures for the transformation of the US into a more environmentally conscious, decentralized society centered around coherently planned urban regions. Toward this end, the RPAA emphasized mandatory state planning, programs to build low-cost housing, and energy conservation. The association also sharply, and quite publicly, critiqued the Regional Plan of New York. While at least initially they stood in opposition to one another, both the example of the New York regional plan and the activities of the members of the RPAA exerted tremendous influence on planning thought in the U.S. Though advocating different versions of urban decentralization, the New York plan and its RPAA critics nevertheless demonstrated a kind of holistic thinking about urban regions that had never before been so clearly expressed.¹¹ The influence of the writings of members of both groups on federal policy during the New Deal and World War II led to an expansion of federal interest in using planning and policy analysis as tools for managing the economy and eventually to a new era of formalized efforts to introduce coordinated planning into all the nation's urban areas.¹²

As the nation's population continued to urbanize and the economy shifted back to peacetime, gauzy regional plans became popular channels in the late 1940s for politicians and businesses to advocate for economic growth and infrastructure development. Using catchy names and splashy graphics, early post-war regional development plans were often spearheaded by chambers of commerce and comprised of business elites interested in helping their localities capture a share of the growing national wealth. Though they had their beginnings in private organizations, the archetypical arrangement being Burnham and Bennett's 1909 *Plan for Chicago* (which had been sponsored by the Commercial Club of Chicago), these plans were nevertheless public civic activities.¹³ Early regional development plans tended to outline a top-down approach, with elaborate visualizations of new freeways, futuristic urban transit systems, and spacious suburban neighborhoods along the city's edge. In addition to the publicity the plans were intended to generate, they also accomplished a number of more concrete tasks, including laying out the schematics for transportation systems, identifying areas for redevelopment, and advocating for large Planned Unit Developments (PUD) and new suburban towns to accommodate the anticipated population boom.

The first publicly (locally) financed regional planning agencies also emerged in the years just after World War II. Though at times assuming different forms, the agencies tended to be comprised of a board of local elected officials and a small professional staff, often having only modest means of support. But with the first federal mandates for regional planning coming along with the 1954 Housing Act (designed to assist with the distribution of federal funds for urban redevelopment projects), almost immediately public regional agencies began to shift and expand their focus in anticipation

of the coming federal largesse that would be available for infrastructure building. By the time the Federal-Aid Highway Act was signed by President Eisenhower in 1956, publicly funded regional planning agencies were a well-established feature of the governing environment of cities around the country.¹⁴

The federal law that cemented regional planning agencies as permanent parts of the urban development process came by way of the federal Highway Act of 1962. The act rebranded the agencies as Metropolitan Planning Organizations, or MPOs for short, and charged them with managing the planning of all new federal-aid highways in regions with populations of 50,000 or more. In most places, an existing public planning agency was reconfigured to deal with the transportation program issues that were part of the MPO requirement. While the 1962 Act nominally required planning around other issues, i.e. environment and land use, the planning that took place within the early MPOs was usually limited to cursory considerations of the impact new highway infrastructure might have on the surrounding land, with comparatively little attention given to population displacement or longer-term land use and development policy. As the extent of the urban infrastructure spread over the national landscape, the externalities of transportation system development became increasingly visible and hard to ignore (even if these externalities were unintentional).

To deal with these consequences, the agencies that began as a part of an effort to organize and direct funds into transportation projects were transformed (again) into more comprehensive regional planning bodies during the 1960s and 1970s. The number of federal and state policies that touched planning and development issues increased manifold during this period. Beginning in 1964, a series of new policies came on the

scene: 1964 Highway Act, 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1966 Historic Preservation Act, 1966 Metropolitan Development Act, 1968 Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, 1969 NEPA, 1970 Clean Air Act revision, and 1972 Clean Water Act. These policies were designed to address both the externalities of development at the local and metropolitan scale and continue a national program of building infrastructure, giving regional planning agencies considerable influence and power in the growing government bureaucracy. As the natural environment became part of a more complex science with measurable standards, which could be linked to decisions about transportation and land use and received greater attention, the idea that planning could and should lead to policies that protect air quality and water from the effects of development gained ground. By the mid-1970s these ideas began to reform the core activities of public regional planning agencies.¹⁵ The MPO finally began to look a little more like the comprehensive agency its nomenclature suggested.

The number of new responsibilities assigned to regional planning agencies made regional development plans more difficult to produce. But requirements associated with those tasks also gave new focus to the regional planning process itself, tightening the connection between transportation, the environment, and land use patterns. And expansion of federal power created a constellation of programs that, because of overlaps and inconsistencies, were becoming the subject of a public debate about the proper relationship between federal, state, and local governments. The terms of this debate touched on fundamental beliefs about the way government should work, and would shape the context that regional planning agencies like ARC occupied.¹⁶ The trouble was how to make explicit the connection between social and economic conditions, the natural

environment, and the built landscape. In requirements that environmental and transportation policies be explicitly tied together came the need for new techniques to measure existing conditions and extend the implications of those conditions into the future in a convincing way. Hence projections of the size of the future population and workforce would become intertwined with projections of traffic congestion and air and water quality. Accounting for the density of the relationships at the core of this critical nexus demanded a reordering of the regional planning process.

While, with a few exceptions, parcel-level decision-making authority (zoning and building permitting) remained embedded in local jurisdictions (municipalities and counties), the growing complexity of the programs regional agencies were responsible for gave the agencies greater influence over shaping the broader context in which small-scale development decisions would be made. This expanded power can be seen in the changing practices of ARC. Pushed by both federal and state requirements for the contents of regional plans, the Commission began to place transportation and environmental infrastructure (roads, sewers, water plants) on more equal footing. As a result of 1970s revisions to the Clean Air Act and rising recognition of the association between transportation patterns and urban air quality, the link between transportation and environmental policy grew even closer in the 1980s.¹⁷ And with the introduction of the CAA amendments in 1990 and ISTEA in 1991, the role of regional agencies in coordinating transportation and environmental planning became even more important during the 1990s.¹⁸

Thought it may appear otherwise, the combination of politics and policies that supported mass suburbanization in the second half of the 20th century were not the result

of a malicious, national master plan.¹⁹ Government action, through fits and starts, ended up creating a set of conditions highly favorable to home ownership, and once adequate resources were available to a wide enough cross-section of the population, households that were able took advantage of what was clearly a good deal, moving en masse out of central cities and toward outposts along an ever-expanding suburban fringe. I mention this simply to further underscore the idea that planning at the regional scale has been forged by a complex set of interactions attended to by an array of actors. No single event or decision exerted a definitive influence on the direction the region took. And from a cursory glance, the procession of land development certainly looks like the result of a chaotic process (as Downs noted). Yet there is an order and logic to metropolitan development that reveals itself slowly, and only by stringing major planning events together can the total effect of regional coordination be witnessed, and how that coordination has been supported and managed by regional planning agencies. Focusing on the long-term work of a regional agency deeply rooted in a particularly place provides us with the chance to see in detail how the process unfolds, and the influence regional planning institutions exert on the sprawling suburban metropolis.

Both regional planning agencies and the plans they produce tend to be viewed as ends-focused, though the complexity of their activities and the manifold connections they maintain suggest a means-focus might be more appropriate. Looking at the details of the structure of major regional planning activities helps answer questions about what a plan is, how planning should be understood (a measure of the value of the activity), and whether we should re-evaluate our perception of regional plans and regional agencies. Viewing these agencies as integral parts of an on-going planning discourse based in a set

of institutional relationships reveals metropolitan Atlanta's landscape to be not the result of uncoordinated or random events, but rather the product of a loose regional vision (embodied by ARC) that guided the behavior of the public agencies and private actors responsible for setting the development trajectory of the region, resulting in the massive (but manicured) sprawl for which it is now known.²⁰

At a more concrete level, the process of regional planning in Atlanta unfolded in the course of meetings, conversations, news reports, conferences, and public hearings, as well as through an array of written materials, reports, plans, and maps, all of which have organized a series of intricate, at times overlapping, events. The details of the regional planning process, contained in the organization and timing of meetings, the contents of staff reports, and the gathering and cleaning of data, provides insight into the fluid and complicated relationship between levels of government and private citizens; how a vision of regional development was expressed; and how the image of a seamless, low-density urban area was conceptualized and then realized. In Atlanta we find a story of region, rather than simply a story of a city and suburbs, and a story of a regional planning agency, not just to a story of capitalism, racism, and power elites.

That said, the role of the Atlanta Regional Commission in the development process can be theorized from two directions. Michel Foucault wrote extensively on the means by which power is embedded in modern institutions, writings that cannot easily be summarized in a few sentences. But in the course of interviews, he often did just that, summarizing his thinking for the sake of clarification. And so in a 1977 interview, Foucault suggested that one of his primary interests had been excavating and contesting the common definition of power as simply a repressive ('No!') force, arguing instead that

power “needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body.”²¹ Foucault recognized that power might be particularly visible in the activities of spatially bound agencies, though he stopped short of fully developing this insight. From a different direction, Henri Lefebvre wrote about the ways power was expressed in the fundamental social and economic relationships at the core of the modern metropolis, which he argued were ultimately grounded by a process of urbanization.²² Urbanization, which Lefebvre defined as the process of extending both the urban fabric and the urban economy across the countryside, is the process by which urban life comes to dominate everywhere. With this domination comes a necessary reordering of space, which Lefebvre understood as a process whereby the particular spaces of the city and the country become part of a new global space.²³ Lefebvre’s notion of a global space forms a geographic side of Foucault’s notion of a network of power.

Both ideas can be connected to observations of the techniques institutions use to manage their jurisdictions. ARC stands as an example of a spatially-bound agency through which a broad power network runs, and that learned to use available tools to maintain its position in the network. The Commission was a central player in the regional network of organizations, governments, and individuals that oversaw land development. Its power was expressed in its managing the flow of land development information across jurisdictional lines, its position in-between different levels of government, and the support it received from larger political entities. As a result of its diffuse power, ARC emerged as one of several key institutions spreading both planning and urbanization, first to Atlanta area jurisdictions, then across the entire state. It is in this sense that I borrow from Foucault and Lefebvre a way of framing the administrative

work of the Atlanta Regional Commission and its hand in planning and coordinating the development of metropolitan Atlanta.

Planning Metropolitan Atlanta

In the early-1950s, as Atlanta appeared poised to grow well beyond its city limits, consolidation and growth boundaries looked like useful development policies. The region's first two comprehensive regional plans codified this, 1952's *Up... Ahead* and 1954's *Now...For Tomorrow*, both produced by the nascent Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC). Both plans presented a vision of the future spatial development of the region that emphasized cooperation across jurisdictions. Early planning documents stressed the importance of two seemingly contradictory notions, a distinct regional identity that includes both central city and outlying areas, and a spatial limit to the region's growth. Over the four-year period during which the two regional plans were produced, two issues were identified that would emerge again and again over the next half century; both were partly in debt to Lewis Mumford's vision of what regional planning should achieve and partly in debt to the empirical techniques developed in the 1929 Regional Plan of New York. The first was the opportunity presented by a program of publicly planned population decentralization. The second was the problem of haphazard development of residential subdivisions in outlying districts. While there was general consensus that the region would grow outward, partly due to the fact that it has no topographic barriers, there was also a belief that material limits to sprawl existed.

Regional planning in Atlanta in the 1950s emphasized such limitations: a rudimentary growth boundary, future urban service areas, targeted redevelopment districts, a circumferential railroad, and an undeveloped green belt, ideas borrowed from Howard's Garden City, the Greenbelt towns during the New Deal, and the first Regional Plan of New York.²⁴

By 1959, ideas about regional planning began to shift. During the process of putting the recently enacted Federal Aid Highway Act into concrete form, two studies by the MPC emphasized through detailed plans the need for building an entire series of limited access expressways to improve central city access.²⁵ In the early 1960s, the push to build new infrastructure to aid central city access became even more pronounced, while the idea of an urban boundary had all but disappeared. The tension in this strategy was captured in a 1962 publication, *Atlanta Silhouettes*, produced by the Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning Commission (ARMPC), the successor organization to the MPC, that juxtaposed the old central city as the beating heart of the region to the exploitability of the abundant vacant land just outside the city as an exploitable resource. Population and employment trends were projected further outward even while access to the central business district was presented as the lynchpin of the region's sustainability. This document would serve an important role in later regional planning efforts. In 1972, when new regional population forecasts were being prepared, *Silhouettes* became an important reference, ensuring a continuity of process whereby new projections were created and fit within an old policy framework.²⁶

As the shift to encouraging urban dispersal unfolded, regional plans came to focus on transportation and environmental infrastructure, mirroring trends at the federal level.

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) was created by act of the Georgia General Assembly in 1971, as successor to ARMPC, to unite transportation, environmental, and land use planning functions. In the years following, ARC, in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Transportation, coordinated the completion of the freeway transportation system in the five counties that comprised metro Atlanta, undertook an array of planning support activities, including overseeing the distribution of funds for water management made available by the 1972 Clean Water Act, aiding the development of the new regional rail transit system, and helping lead a campaign to control the region's primary surface water supply.

An important part of ARC's responsibility for orchestrating regional planning activities was producing periodic regional development plans (RDP). The product of a three-year process that brought together a variety of local elected officials, planners, and representatives from state agencies and the federal government, the 1975 RDP represents one of first major activities of the ARC. This crucial RDP was written during the height of the expansion of federal transportation and environmental regulations and the plan turned out to be one of the agency's defining projects. The process marshaled an array of studies, public meetings, reports, press releases, and newsletters, and involved bringing different groups to the same table, providing an official forum for discussing planning concepts, filtering information to journalists, disseminating ideas to area planners, and writing policies. The resulting document, divided into substantive chapters, was supposed to crystallize the region's development vision for the following ten years. Urging both maintaining the old CBD as the primary activity center and providing space for new conservation-style suburban developments, the plan used an activity allocation

model that projected jobs and population growth toward the edges of the region, outlining in the process a vision for low-density sprawl. This vision was fleshed out in a series of policies and forecasts, many of which would reappear over the coming years.

With the adoption of the Chattahoochee River Management Plan in 1973, ARC opened another theater in its effort to guide the development of the region. Designed to guide development along a 48-mile stretch of the river north of Atlanta (the region's main surface water source), the river corridor plan proved to be another tool ARC could use to establish its authority over the region's development patterns. Because the river held such a vital role in the region's water supply (and wastewater disposal), federal, state, and local leaders had long recognized the likelihood that local governments were not on their own in a position to manage the resource effectively. Though initially resisted by a few local politicians, the legitimacy of the Chattahoochee plan and the Commission's authority to intervene in decisions about development along the river were firmly established after ARC threatened to sue one of its constituent governments during a dispute over the issuing of land development permits to a landowner within the river corridor. When a legal fight between Georgia, Alabama, and Florida over who would control access to the resources of the Chattahoochee appeared to be in the offing, federal interest in the region's water supply was further piqued, leading to the initiation of the Atlanta Study, a larger and more sustained effort to catalogue and plan for the region's long-term water supply. The Atlanta Study would unfold over a five-year period, bringing about a massive data-gathering effort and giving rise to new ideas about regional water planning and the necessity of establishing a state-backed regional water authority.

By the time the pieces of legislation that would together form the Georgia Planning Act (GPA) were signed by Governor Joe Frank Harris in 1989, metro Atlanta had experienced three decades of rapid growth. With roots in legislation passed all the way back in 1957 that first granted municipalities and counties legal grounds to adopt comprehensive development plans, and indebted to an idea Jimmy Carter introduced at the end of his single, reform-minded gubernatorial term, the GPA represented the culmination of a process that began fifteen years ago to establish a new legal framework for regional and local comprehensive development planning. The act sought several ends: increased protection for rivers and wetlands, mandatory local planning, and a system of reservoirs for water supply. The perception of serious environmental externalities from rapid growth in metropolitan Atlanta and requirements from the federal government to control surface water degradation helped propel passage of the GPA. Over time, ARC had been devising and testing the ancestors to the state's planning requirements in metro Atlanta before they were rolled out to the rest of the state. Upon being signed into law, the legislation instantly expanded the state's involvement in land use and environmental issues, and put forth new regulations on development practices.

In 1990 the federal Clean Air Act was significantly revised, and with the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Equity Act (ISTEA) in 1991, new requirements for demonstrating how regional transportation plans would contribute to the improvement of urban air quality turned dirty air into a powerful regulatory issue. As EPA debated and organized its enforcement techniques during the early 1990s, the pressure increased for planning agencies in regions where ambient air quality that did not meet pre-set standards to produce plans that showed how future conformance to the standards would be

achieved.²⁷ EPA's new air quality standards swept Atlanta and Georgia up into the rank of places in which stern enforcement was likely to be necessary.

In early 1996, after the state failed to submit an acceptable air quality mitigation plan, EPA ruled that all the counties in metro Atlanta that were currently out of federal air quality compliance would have a portion of their federal funds for transportation planning and construction suspended if the state and ARC did not come up with a plan that clearly demonstrated how the region would reduce vehicle emissions. In early 1997, before a revised air quality plan could be submitted to EPA, a lawsuit filed by a consortium of environmental groups challenged the good intentions of the regional transportation planning process in Atlanta, alleging that ARC and the state had attempted to circumvent the penalties the region was facing by grandfathering several major road projects into the federal funding pipeline before the EPA deadline put federal money out of reach (assuming the state would be unable to develop an acceptable mitigation plan in time). After rather lengthy legal wrangling, the two sides reached an out-of-court settlement, agreeing that only a few of the road projects in the funding pipeline should be grandfathered. The bulk would be removed from the region's transportation plans. Though negotiations between the federal government, ARC, and the state continued in an attempt to come up with an acceptable air quality plan, and EPA extended the final deadline several times, a conforming plan failed to materialize. Hence in 1998, EPA suspended all federal funds for transportation projects that did not show a positive contribute to air quality improvement until ARC and the state could devise an acceptable plan. The agency otherwise remained lenient, finally accepting an interim transportation plan in 1999, which meant a re-opening of the funding pipeline on the promise that a

permanent plan would be shortly forthcoming. The high profile publicity generated by the loss of federal transportation money and the environmental lawsuits together generated a visible regional planning crisis. Issues of congestion and air quality, which had been part of the planning discourse for fifty years, had finally garnered the undivided attention of the planning community.²⁸

With the election of Roy Barnes in 1998, a centrist Democrat from suburban Cobb County, Atlanta's air quality crisis moved to the center of the state's political stage. Promising to confront the rapidly expanding development issues bearing down on metro Atlanta, which many believed would inhibit Georgia's economic competitiveness, Barnes immediately set about creating a new regional planning agency. Basing legislation on an idea for a regional 'super agency' that had been bounced around the state legislature for twenty five years, Barnes orchestrated passage of the bill that created the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) during the 1999 session of the General Assembly, an effort that became the centerpiece of his first year in office. An ostensibly powerful body, GRTA was born with the purpose of reinforcing the coordination of transportation and land use planning across jurisdictions in metro Atlanta. Its regulatory functions and funding were mostly oriented toward transportation issues, but it also had power over land use decisions, the ability to raise bonds to fund transportation planning activities (including the operation of local transit systems), and the power of eminent domain.

After generating such widespread and genuine excitement with GRTA and its hopeful new powers to finally kick the habit of road building, Barnes surprised many of his supporters when two years later he began publicly advocating for building a massive

new suburban freeway across the northern reaches of the region. Though Barnes' advocacy was initially largely symbolic, coming as it did on the heels of the transportation funding controversy and the public's apparent growing frustration with seemingly unchecked development, his support of building a new freeway turned into a flashpoint.²⁹

Not without its own history, the idea of a 200-hundred mile long a suburban loop freeway had been discussed at a number of junctures, having periodically emerged as a major regional issue since the early 1970s. Planned as both a developmental highway and a way to direct truck traffic away from the center of the region, the proposed road had a diameter that stretched more than 30 miles from the central city, but had failed to materialize because of funding shortfalls and political volatility. But as suburbs north of the city grew through the 1980s, several large subregional employment and shopping nodes developed in the triangle formed by I-75, I-85, and I-285, attracting commuters from all directions, but particularly those making cross-town, suburb-to-suburb trips. With an increase in east-west travel, traffic congestion in the northern suburbs was becoming a much bigger issue, especially as the region's air quality continued to decline. In 1994, an effort jointly managed by ARC and the Georgia Department of Transportation to re-introduce the Outer Loop resulted in a contentious debate within the planning community about the damage such a road might do to the region's air quality. After several years, a lawsuit, and much hand wringing, ARC and the state adopted a transportation plan in 1997 that excluded funding for the entire Loop, but did provide funds to continue studying the future demand for a particular northern section of the road. In 1999, in the aftermath of the air quality lawsuits, a revised transportation plan,

excluding any part of the Outer Loop altogether, was adopted as part of a deal with the federal government to re-open the flow of road building money to the region. The battles that ensued as a result of Barnes' maneuvering included a tangle of issues that cut to heart of the relationship between the bureaucratic and political sides of regional planning. An array of environmental and planning organizations proposed various measures that included putting the brakes on sprawl by tightening development regulations, changing the way regional planning gets done, and making huge new investments in mass transit.

The National Context

Deciding where to build the infrastructure that supports land development is among the most important and politically charged moments in the planning process. Such decisions result from the interaction and conflict of a range of different stakeholders, which comprise the practice and politics of planning. The decisions necessarily work through a complex of policies and regulations formed at a variety of different political scales: federal, state, district, regional, county, municipal. In many respects, planning decisions tend to be viewed as the domain of local politics (cities, townships, or counties), and prior to the New Deal and World War II this was largely true. Transportation and environmental planning were regulated at the local, or state level, and the federal government played a quiet role.

But the end of World War II ushered in several major demographic shifts and a change in the role federal institutions would play in shaping metropolitan regions. As whites began to move from central cities and small towns to suburbs, blacks migrated from the rural south to industrial cities in the north, corporations quietly decentralized

their operations, and Sunbelt cities began to grow rapidly, the urban landscape started down a seemingly inexorable path of change. Experiences under the New Deal and wartime economy spurred a dramatically expanded level of involvement in planning by the federal government. Through a series of new policies, the federal role in actively planning the urban landscape became more expansive. The design and construction of the interstate highway system opened huge tracts of land to development while generous federally insured loans (and new construction techniques) made new single-family homes affordable to a wide cross-section of society. Fertility rates climbed and advances in automobile production techniques made car ownership cheap. These factors together accelerated the dissolution of physical connections between individual residence, neighborhood, and workplace, providing a great swath of middle-income workers with the means to move themselves out of dense central cities and into comparatively spacious suburban subdivisions.³⁰

At the same time, pushed by federal funding and aggressive state-level development policies, the Sunbelt states started down a long trajectory of growth.³¹ Located at the confluence of three major arteries of the Interstate Highway System, Atlanta emerged as one of the leading destinations for population migration and job growth. While the central city experienced a certain level of white out-migration and black in-migration between 1950 and 1970, mimicking the patterns of decline and racial segregation in northern industrial cities like Detroit and Cleveland, during the same period, fueled by a robust local economy and mild climate, the pace of metro Atlanta's population growth accelerated much like other urban places in the Sunbelt, stretching into a broad suburban metropolis built around an economic base of service and distribution.³²

New layers of regulation began to emerge in the mid-1960s. A series of policies were instituted that required states and municipalities to devise much more complex and regionally oriented transportation plans in order to qualify for federal funds.

Transportation planning was, for the first time, required to engage the general public, address civil rights, provide for the relocation of individuals displaced by road building, assess the environmental impacts of development, and coordinate land use with transportation activities. Though not always pursued with vigor, these changes tweaked existing channels of local control over the planning process, and introduced a new bureaucracy that would restructure regional planning and the urban landscape over the next three decades. As the corollary requirements for transportation planning grew, environmental and land use policy, previously on the backburner of local government, increasingly fell under federal oversight.

By the early 1970s, even deeper changes in federal and state policy and in the U.S. economy encouraged what might be called a second wave of suburbanization. The migration of blacks to the north slowed and then reversed, international immigration expanded, the economy suffered a major reshuffling, and the full effect of federal civil rights legislation began to be felt.³³ New requirements for metropolitan-level planning introduced a wave of new infrastructure funds. The shifting federal involvement in planning was significant, not only because it took on many issues that previously had been decided at the local level, but also because the policies were aimed explicitly at the interrelationship of transportation and the environment. Awareness of the negative externalities associated with suburban development began at the local level, made its way into federal policy, and then in a newly codified form flowed back down to state,

regional, and local planning institutions for implementation. In other words, a new constellation of policies was created that directly influenced the structure and organization of the built environment.³⁴

Unlike urbanization in the early post-war years, changes in federal policy in the 1970s did little to help central cities recapture lost population. As a result, Atlanta's growth occurred largely in unincorporated sections of its suburban/exurban fringe.³⁵ During the period between 1970 and 2002, the Atlanta region grew from about 1.6 million people spread over 7 counties to 4.3 million people in 28 counties.³⁶ Migrants who originated in metropolitan counties in the Northeast and Midwest and smaller towns in the South drove the early years of this growth, but around 1990 the volume of international immigrants increased as thousands of newcomers began arriving from Latin America and South and East Asia. Like most domestic migrants, the majority of immigrants settled outside the central city boundaries, resulting in a patchwork pattern of ethnic pockets scattered across the region, which continues to complicate the old black-white divide.³⁷

These events together signaled the transformation of cities and their suburbs into broad metropolitan regions, and helped push the boundaries of the urban fringe almost exponentially further into the hinterlands. What began as decentralization had turned into deconcentration. In the early post-war years (between 1946 and 1970), most suburbs remained relatively compact; people still went to the CBD to work and shop. Public transit systems were transferred from private hands to public authorities and several new regional rail systems appeared. But after 1970, trends that originated in the earliest days after World War II accelerated. The size of the average housing unit began to expand

while the average number of people per household shrank, the percent of work trips made on mass transit declined precipitously, and the average distance between work and home grew. The horizontal expansion of urban areas was almost completely decoupled from the pressure of population growth, with dramatic results in the built environment.

As Atlanta's population grew, it demonstrated this process vividly. Up until about 1970, growth outside the city was largely adjacent to the city limits, the product of city residents moving to newly open suburban subdivisions. But by the mid-1970s, population growth beyond the inner suburbs began to accelerate rapidly. That the region's population tripled in just over three decades is an astonishing rate of growth in any context. Yet what is perhaps more telling is how the share of regional growth shifted dramatically away from the urban core. In 1960, the city of Atlanta contained $\frac{1}{2}$ the regional population and Fulton and Dekalb counties together accounted for 80%; even by 1970 the city still accounted for one third of the region's total, and Fulton and Dekalb just shy of three quarters. But by 2002, the city held less than $\frac{1}{10}$ of the region's population and the Fulton/Dekalb share had fallen to 36%. In 1900, the population density of what could be defined as metro Atlanta was nearly 6000 persons per square mile. By 1960, this density had dropped by half, to around 3000 persons per square mile. It continued to decline over the following decades, falling to 600 persons per square mile by 2000.

Looking Forward

Between the early 1970s and early 1990s, government support for comprehensive planning expanded dramatically. By the late 1980s, regulation of the built environment was more clearly articulated than ever before.³⁸ But despite new regulations,

technologically savvy tools, a more sophisticated planning discourse, and regional institutions equipped with better resources, the urban landscape continued to bleed into the countryside. Atlanta's horizontal march across the landscape grew more rapid and voracious. By virtue of this growth, researchers have often charged that regional planning is weak and in need of significant reform.³⁹ Typical solutions call for bigger, more powerful regional agencies to take the place of ineffective COGs and MPOs. Again, Anthony Downs on the subject, "[c]reating regional governance arrangements that can influence key land-use and transportation decisions over all the counties in the Atlanta region is absolutely essential to solving the region's pressing growth-related and social problems."⁴⁰

Despite what Downs' says, sophisticated regional institutions already existed, agencies which had long been a key part of the coordination of actors and institutions involved in the process of carving out places in the undifferentiated space of the metropolis. Without limiting geography, the shape of metropolitan Atlanta is a clear manifestation of this regulatory framework. The processes that established ARC, implemented the GPA, created GRTA, and then later defeated the Northern Arc, demonstrate the cumulative nature of transportation and environmental policies, and belie the image of a disconnected, balkanized collection of independent political fiefdoms. Yet each policy arena possessed an alter-ego, which emerged in due time. Environmental policies encouraged land conservation, water protection, and neighborhood preservation. But these regulations also encouraged and accommodated a far-flung single-family housing stock built around a system of cul-de-sacs, setbacks, and stream buffers. Regional transportation plans focused on reducing congestion and improving air quality

by expanding roads and building a commuter-oriented mass transit system. But good roads allowed the urban-rural fringe to push further away from the central city and the transit system was chained to an outdated hub-and-spoke heavy rail, resulting in a commuting shed that reaches north to touch Tennessee and west into Alabama. The realization of this vision changed Atlanta's metropolitan politics, effectively rending the old central city – suburb dichotomy, creating in its place a suburban/metropolitan landscape.⁴¹

Exploring the nature of the relationships that created this vision raises several important issues about how regional planning works in growing urban regions. First, the landscape is the result of an on-going negotiation between bureaucratic institutions (planning agencies) and political actors (politicians, developers, residents), a point important to understanding how the metropolis is created and sustained over time.⁴² The balance in the negotiation often hinges on the power of administration that regional planning agencies have obtained by virtue of their position between public regulation and private development. Second, there is more to regional coordination than meets the eye. The impact of regional projects evades easy evaluation in part because connections between environmental and transportation policies and resulting land use patterns are negotiated between different levels of government, and expressed in a set of intricate institutional relationships. Metro Atlanta reflects a multi-scalar coordination of policy and ideas that goes on behind the scenes. Third, the legacy of regional planning exerts a strong influence on the character of regional agencies. Regional agencies tend to draw both from their specific context as well as the broader regionalist tradition dating from the early 20th century. Treating regional planning as a product of the spillover effects and

negative externalities of local development decisions fails to comprehend regional agencies as historically contingent organizations. Fourth, state support remains crucial for regional planning agencies to become active (and at times aggressive) participants in the development decisions that profoundly influence metropolitan form. But state support does not guarantee enlightened regional planning. Looking carefully at the work of regional planning institutions and the activities they are involved with over time provides a richer, more instructive view of how development policies are actually devised and implemented, and why regional planning does not necessarily mean less sprawl.

The last 30 years of regional planning reflect significant changes in the politics of urban development and the ways that region-wide coordination of land use and transportation planning gets expressed. The vision behind this landscape remained surprisingly coherent, which contradicts the common charge that metropolitan areas have experienced excessive political fragmentation. Since 1970, low-density suburbs and exurbs have expanded at a rapid pace, but largely because they have been planned to do so. As these suburbs absorbed people and jobs, the center of urban political power shifted from central cities to wider metropolitan regions. As the low-density, auto-centered landscape grew ubiquitous, conservation and environmental movements became more assertive about attributing ecological damage to suburban development practices, while homeowners became more sensitive to the congestion brought by population and economic growth. Popular accounts of the experience of congestion and a sharpened sense of social isolation resulting from the expansion of low density suburban places added fuel to this discussion. Yet challenges brought by suburban homeowners were fraught with contradictory demands. The very existence of low-density, single-family

subdivisions was predicated on the kind of growth politics being questioned. Thus challenges to the prevailing politics of planning have been about who controls the process, not about changing the physical form of the landscape.⁴³

The years (1946-1970) leading up to the creation and implementation most of these regulations have been well documented, but the post-implementation effect of the confluence of so many new regulations remains unclear. I argue that many of the externalities that were to be controlled and mitigated by the expanded regulatory framework got worse, not better. Emphasizing comprehensive transportation and environmental planning, the new regulations assisted a transformation of both regional planning discourse and the institutions that support it, ultimately encouraging urban deconcentration and accelerating sprawl. By examining the records and materials left behind from the on-going process of regional planning in metropolitan Atlanta, I reconstruct a past that will aid planners and policy makers in their ability to better understand the present relationship between planning policy and the political struggles that pervade the metropolis. Reconsidering how regional coordination is defined and works shines a different light on the process of suburbanization, highlighting how the public institutions carrying out regional planning have worked to produce a landscape at odds with their stated aim. Which raises questions about what model an institution like ARC represents. Given the mounting problems associated with sprawling metropolitan development, understanding how and why a particular vision of regional cooperation rises and persists is a subject of intense scholarly and practical interest.

The Anti-Portland?

If Atlanta is a model of regional planning, what kind of model is it? In many respects, Atlanta's regionalist legacy is almost completely at odds with the regionalism of a place like Portland or Minneapolis, the two cities most often identified with regional planning. While coordination among local governments was made possible by the relationship between ARC's political board and planning staff, the support of state government, and the relative lack of local government fragmentation, the ends to which that coordination was put bore little relation to the natural resource protection imperative in Portland or the attempts at a more equitable redistribution of property tax funds in Minneapolis.⁴⁴ In spite of conditions favorable for a progressive regionalism, Atlanta appears to have pursued something else. This directly implicates the Atlanta Regional Commission. Hence we must ask toward what end, and for whom, was Atlanta's regional planning agency working? Answering this question demands a careful look at what ARC actually did over the course of its thirty years. That is where I begin.

¹ Anthony Downs, "Urban Realities: Some Controversial Aspects of the Atlanta Region's Future," *The Brookings Review* (Summer, 1994), p27. Another version of the argument that Atlanta's sprawl is the result of unplanned growth is contained in Robert Bullard, Glenn Johnson, and Angel Torres, *Sprawl City: Race, Politics, and Planning in Atlanta* (Washington: Island Press, 2000).

² For a good example of this kind of evaluation, see Leora Waldner, "Regional Plans, Local Fates? The Influence of the 1976 and 1985 Atlanta Regional Development Plans on Local Government Policy," Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2003

³ The most influential regionalist organizations have been the Regional Planning Association of America, whose members wrote widely about the role regional planning

could play in correcting the iniquities of American-style capitalism and the Regional Plan Association of New York, which produced a regional plan that became a prototype.

⁴ Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

⁵ See William Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of 20th Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁶ See David Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, New York (1984); John Logan and Harvey Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Los Angeles: University of California Press 1987); Charles Ruetheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: the Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996); Drew Whitelegg, "A Battle on Two Fronts: Competitive Urges 'Inside' Atlanta," *Area* (June 2002); Jason Henderson, "Contesting the Spaces of the Automobile: The Politics of Mobility and the Sprawl Debate in Atlanta, Georgia" PhD Dissertation, University of Georgia, 2004.

⁷ See Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Post-war Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁸ The most obvious and significant of the late 19th century intellectual influences on the development of planning in America were Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972) and Patrick Geddes' *City Development: A Study of Parks, Gardens, and Culture-Institutes, a Report to the Carnegie Dumferline Trust* (Birmingham: Saint George, 1904). Both books were widely read and widely debated. The complete scope of peripheral writings that influenced the development of planning is too vast to recount here, but John Friedmann's *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987 explores the many strands of the intellectual origins of planning in splendid detail.

⁹ The Burnham and Bennett's 1909 Plan of Chicago stands as perhaps the most famous region-wide development plan of the early 20th century, but it had a decidedly physical orientation (buildings and streets and parks) and was mostly confined to the city. Therefore, the plan should be considered a precursor to the Regional Plan of New York, but not a true regional plan itself. See Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, edited by Charles Moore (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Among the well-known participants in the New York plan were Clarence Perry, Thomas Adams, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr, Robert Murray Haig, and Edward Bassett. For finer details about the plan and the process behind its production, see David Johnson, *Planning the Great Metropolis: The 1929 Plan of New York and Its Environs* (New York: Taylor & Francis 1995).

¹¹ The history of regional planning in the U.S. has been covered by a variety of authors. Among the major contributions are Roy Lubove, *Community Planning in the 1920s: the*

Contribution of the Regional Planning Association of America (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963); Carl Sussman, ed., *Planning the Fourth Migration: The Neglected Vision of the Regional Planning Association of America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976); John Friedmann and Clyde Weaver, *Territory and Function: the Evolution of Regional Planning* (Berkeley: University of California, 1979); Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the 20th Century* (New York: Blackwell, 1988); Bruce Katz, ed., *Reflections on Regionalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2000); Benton MacKaye, *The New Exploration: a Philosophy of Regional Planning* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Donald Miller, ed., *The Lewis Mumford Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Robert Fishman, ed., *The American Planning Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Robert Fishman, "The Fifth Migration," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 74 (2005)

¹² Mumford's writings are vast, but good introductions to his ideas about regionalism include, Lewis Mumford, "The Ideal Form of the Modern City," in *The Lewis Mumford Reader*, edited by Donald Miller (New York: Pantheon, 1986 [1952]). Publishing only one major work in his lifetime, Ebenezer Howard was more succinct. Patrick Geddes was more prolific, but to see his most famous contribution, see his *City Development: A Study of Parks, Gardens, and Culture-Institutes, a Report to the Carnegie Dumferline Trust*.

¹³ See Burnham and Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*

¹⁴ Richard Flanagan, "The Housing Act of 1954: The Sea Change in National Urban Policy," *Urban Affairs Review*, 33:2 (1997).

¹⁵ See Cliff Ellis, "Interstate Highways, Regional Planning, and the Reshaping of Metropolitan America," *Planning Practice and Research*, 16:3/4 (2001); Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Official Code of Georgia, 50-32-11, 1971; Yale Rabin, "Federal Urban Transportation Policy and the Highway Planning Process in Metropolitan Areas," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 451 (1980).

¹⁶ Sam Bass Warner, *Urban Wilderness: a History of the American City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Graham and Healey, "Relational Concepts of Space and Place: Issues for Planning Theory and Practice," *European Planning Studies*, 7:5 (1999)

¹⁷ The 1977 revisions to the Clean Air Act (the second major change to air quality legislation in the decade) made mobile sources of pollution (i.e. cars and trucks) a new front in the national effort to deal with declining urban air quality. For an extended discussion of these changes, see David Currie, "The Mobile-Source Provisions of the Clean Air Act," *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 46/4 (1979). For more about the policy context of the CAA, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*.

¹⁸ For the main contemporary attempt to write a history of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) see Mark Solof, "History of Metropolitan Planning Organizations," *NJTPA Issue Report* (January, 1998)

¹⁹ Ideas about urban decentralization date from at least the mid-19th century, and have been through a number of iterations. See Robert Owen, *A New Society and Other Writings* (New York: Dutton, 1972 [1817]); Charles Fourier, *Design for Utopia: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier* (New York: Schocken, 1976 [1901]); Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972); Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987 [1929]); Clarence Stein, *Toward New Towns for America* (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1957); John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action*; John Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939* (New Haven: Yale University, 1988).

²⁰ For an interesting, albeit dangerously abstract, discussion of Atlanta's extremely manicured built environment, see Rem Koolhaas, *Atlanta* (New York: Actar, 1995). In discussing the development of early Boston suburbs, Sam Bass Warner notes that "a kind of partnership" between individuals and institutions gave the suburbs their physical shape, and that "common ideas and attitudes created the partnership" which "colored every decision, whether it was a decision made by the director of a large corporation or by a mortgage-pressed carpenter." I argue in this dissertation that regional development in Atlanta happened in a similar way, with ARC serving as the key institution in promulgating partnership among actors. See Sam Bass Warner, Jr, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

²¹ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) page 119.

²² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nichols-Smith (New York: Blackwell, 1991); Mark Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989); Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (New York: Verso, 2000); Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991)

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, translated by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1970) p155.

²⁴ AHC, *From Mule to Marta*, Box 124, Folder 3, Interview with Walter Douglas, August 5, 1977

²⁵ AHC, ARCC, Metropolitan Planning Commission, "Crosstown and By-pass Expressways," 1959

²⁶ AHC, ARCC, "Work Program," 1972, p13: "[t]hese new forecasts of areawide totals become key inputs to the plan formulation and evaluation phases of the regional planning cycle."

²⁷ Stone, "Air Quality by Design: Harnessing the Clean Air Act to Manage Metropolitan Growth."

²⁸ Leon Eplan, "Atlanta Airs Its Options," *Planning* 65, no. 11 (1999)

²⁹ See Henderson, "Contesting the Spaces of the Automobile: The Politics of Mobility and the Sprawl Debate in Atlanta, Georgia," Chapter 8 for a brief version of the story.

³⁰ The literature on this subject is big and constantly growing. It's foundations were laid by Warner, *Urban Wilderness*; Ira Katznelson, *Urban Trenches* (New York: Columbia

University Press, 1981); Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). More recent work has situated the broad processes of suburban history into more specific contexts, revealing details about how federal policies, local politics, and demographic shifts played out on the ground. See Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Self, *American Babylon*; Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*.

³¹ David Goldfield, *Cotton fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development and the Transformation of the South 1938 – 1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)

³² See Hirsh, *Making the Second Ghetto*; Bayor, *Race and the Twentieth Century City*; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Kruse, *White Flight*.

³³ See Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*.

³⁴ For an extended discussion of the rise of the modern environmental movement see Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Hal Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States since 1945* (Forth Worth: Harcourt, Brace, 1997); and Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³⁵ See William Tabb, “Urban Development and Regional Restructuring, an Overview,” *Sunbelt Snowbelt: Urban Development and Regional Restructuring*, edited by Larry Sawers and William Tabb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984)

³⁶ See U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2003.

³⁷ See Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*; U.S. Census Bureau, (2000)

³⁸ Frank Popper, “Understanding American Land Use Regulation Since 1970: A Revisionist Interpretation,” *Journal of the America Planning Association* 54, no. 3 (1988).

³⁹ In the last few years, a group of researchers have begun advocating a ‘new regionalism’ to deal with the complicated problems urban development has created. A representative publication is Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005)

⁴⁰ Downs, “Urban Realities: Some Controversial Aspects of the Atlanta Region’s Future,” p28

⁴¹ See Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

⁴² See Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, Chapter 1.

⁴³ For an introduction to this literature, which merges discussions of design, planning, and social life, see Peter Blake, *God’s Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America’s Landscape* (New York: Hold, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964); Alan Pisarski, *Commuting in America : A National Report on Commuting Patterns and Trends* (Westport, CT: Eno Foundation, 1987); Alan Pisarski, *Commuting in America II: the Second National Report on Commuting Patterns and Trends* (Landsdowne, VA: Eno Foundation, 1996); Hank Dittmar, “A Broader Context for Transportation Planning,”

Journal of the American Planning Association 61, no. 1 (1995); Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: the Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (New York: North Point Press, 2000); Paul Vitello, "The Next Thing in Tolls," *New York Times*, 11 June (2006).
⁴⁴ Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: a Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).

Chapter 2

Building the Atlanta Regional Commission

Introduction

In voting to create the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) in 1971, the Georgia General Assembly responded to the combined pressure of changes in federal law and local politics by bestowing the new regional agency with the responsibility of managing local interactions with federal transportation and environmental policy. ARC replaced four existing, overlapping organizations as part of an effort to consolidate and improve the level of coordination across political jurisdictions in the face of anticipated population and employment growth.¹ The realization of this growth had been the product of Atlanta's history of self-promotion campaigns, beginning not long after the end of Reconstruction and continuing all the way to the present.² The rise of the ARC marks an important moment in the development of the region, reflecting the confluence of major changes in state government and the intervention of a number of new federal policies aimed at exerting more control over local and regional land development practices. While continuing in the tradition of Atlanta's publicly-supported regional planning agencies, which had been in continuous operation since 1947, the ARC was larger and more sophisticated than any of the bodies it replaced, and represented a leap forward in

terms of the general task of convening local governments around a common table in order to make regional decisions.³ By looking back at the events that lead to the creation of the commission, we can see how the early structuring of the agency enabled it to later become a powerful agent in the region's development. While originating at the federal level, the channels by which transportation, land use, and environmental policies were implemented were a product of the interaction of local, state, and federal politics. The regional agencies, which formed at this confluence of levels of government, were responsible for seeing those policies carried out and subsequently assumed an important role in the process, albeit in a sometimes less than visible way. Thus how those agencies were written into existence, what kinds of activities they would house and support, the information they would generate and disseminate, and means they would use to create and implement policies takes on heightened importance. The case of ARC demonstrates the quiet power of convening and managing the regional discourse regarding planning and development.

The importance of the structure and shape of this conversation was reflected in a 1977 interview with Walter Douglas, a transportation engineer who was involved in the planning of Atlanta's regional mass transit authority (MARTA). Douglas noted the fact that much of Atlanta's growth came after more stringent federal and state transportation, environmental, and intergovernmental regulations had been put into place. Contrasting it with San Francisco (which had only recently completed its own new regional mass transit system), he said that "Atlanta does not have the geography or topography to police its growth in that way," a comment that alludes to the fact that regulations, in lieu of geography or economy or history, would lead to a distinctly different kind of

metropolitan region, one in which planning and infrastructure policies were the key factors in shaping the region.⁴ The idea that the form of metropolitan Atlanta is the product of how policies are devised and implemented provides an important touchstone for thinking about why the structure of the planning agencies working to shape the region actually matters.

Understanding the motivation behind the creation of the ARC helps us see how regional planning was reconfigured nationally in the 1960s into a permanent fixture, and how regional planning agencies negotiated their power to play a significant role in the reorganization of cities and suburbs into metropolitan regions. ARC owes its existence to the coming together of a number of different policy imperatives and represents one step in the long-term expansion of governmental regulation of the urban landscape.⁵ Such expansion also reflects the role of planning as a distinct profession, and its vantage in helping both devise and implement complex systems of regulations that governed the development of the built environment. The tasks delegated to and assumed by the ARC reflected a growing national concern over how the relationships of different levels of government interacted.⁶ The late 1960s were an era of expanding national government, characterized by civil rights, transportation, and environmental legislation. These legislative fronts had to be coordinated in some way. One solution was building of a system of regional agencies that could synthesize and filter federal policies for local consumption. This was the role ARC assumed in metropolitan Atlanta.

Behind the requirements involved in the transportation and housing acts of the 1960s, two federal commissions exerted considerable influence on the federal policies, state laws, and local actions that would reshape regional planning agencies from the early

1970s onward: the National Commission on Urban Problems (popularly know as the Douglas Commission) and the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Affairs (ACIR). While the commissions operated independently, their work and recommendations often dovetailed. The ideas each presented, and the research each sponsored, recognized the deep transformations that were unfolding in metropolitan areas across the country. Both groups were bipartisan by design and drew on the expertise of academics and practitioners and the real world experience of electoral politics. And both commissions emphasized the role of regional coordination across political scales and boundaries as a key to maintaining the health and viability of the country's urban areas.

With the publication of the report, *Building the American City*, in 1969 by the National Commission on Urban Problems chaired by Senator Paul Douglas, a high-profile focus was directed to some of the nuts and bolts problems confronting urban America. While central cities were withering, and in many cases literally still smoldering from two years of civil unrest, suburbs were mushrooming. As significant as the movement of population from central cities to suburbs was the accompanying multiplication of new municipalities. As the report noted, by 1969, metropolitan regions had an average of 91 local governments per MSA. This astounding number of overlapping boundaries carved the political landscape into thousands of tiny pieces, the majority of which had 2,500 people or less. On its face, the idea of such small local government presents a kind of Tocquevillian idyll of civic life, whereby government is close and direct and accessible. But because so many of those small townships also managed to obtain the right to regulate land development within their borders, the task of coordinating so many development decisions became almost impossible. The jagged

political landscape allowed small jurisdictions to use their land regulation power to prohibit multi-family housing units and mandate minimum single-family lot sizes, setting up conditions that tacitly excluded certain demographic groups, identified by race (non-white) and class (low-income), from living within their borders. Of course, these groups were often one and the same. This locked the doors to spatial mobility for a large number of people, and, in effect, locked the doors of economic and social uplift as well.⁷ But the report also made a number of suggestions for reducing metropolitan inequality, which included revising and expanding the public metropolitan planning agencies that had been built in the 1960s in response to federal policies. These suggestions helped spur activity that led to scrapping the collection of agencies that preceded ARC.

Pre-dating the Douglas Commission's efforts to define the mechanics behind visible urban problems, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) was created to provide expert analysis of the myriad issues related to urban governance. One of its many substantive concerns was the issue of regional coordination. While the work of Senator Douglas's group was widely publicized, the ACIR operated largely outside the public eye. Nevertheless, its work formed an important backdrop to the reorganization and expansion of regional planning agencies in the early 1970s. Passed into existence in 1959 by the 86th Congress at the urging of President Eisenhower and Senator Robert Taft, ACIR entered a world of dramatically expanding federal intervention and increasing confusion about the boundaries of responsibility, and thus was charged with researching and recommending solutions to a number of problems of interaction between different levels of government that had become more pronounced as the power and reach of the federal government had

grown.⁸ Comprised of a twenty-six member, bipartisan group of senators, representatives, governors, mayors, county officials, presidential cabinet members, and private citizens, along with a professional staff, the commission fulfilled a unique role in the federal government, doing the critical intellectual legwork that led to a variety of programs and policies that would be enacted during the 1960s and 1970s.⁹ ACIR published a series of reports during the 1960s that influenced both the work of the Douglas Commission and the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act signed into law by President Johnson in 1968. And by tackling issues related to special planning districts, metropolitan disparity, taxation, federal grant-in-aid programs, and urban infrastructure (transportation and water/sewer), later ACIR reports crystallized a number of issues related to regional planning and coordination that would unfold during the 1970s.¹⁰

By the time a reorganization of Atlanta's regional planning agencies was in order, the influence of the reports of both the Douglas Commission and ACIR was unavoidable. While the recommendations of national commissions carried considerable political weight, issues specific to local conditions also shaped the structure of Atlanta's new agency. Thus the flesh of the agency was also the product of state and local politics. That certain tasks mandated by the federal government were finally carried out was important, but the representatives from the urban counties that the agency would ultimately govern made a number of crucial decisions about how the agency should initially look and feel.¹¹ These decisions were as crucial as any others in determining how ARC would fulfill its directive.

Concerted effort by a few key individuals helped secure a more highly centralized body than what federal laws required. The level of behind the scenes coordination that

went into the creation of the Atlanta Regional Commission spoke to the existence of a cohesive bureaucratic corps, which had an easy and relatively open relationship with a collection of local and state politicians, all of who shared certain goals for the development of the region. The cadre of professional planners and administrators that set up the commission went on to guide it through its first years, establishing a durable pattern that would influence the cast of characters who revolved through its doors.

Origins of Metropolitan Atlanta

Like many cities, Atlanta possesses no obvious natural boundaries, which has been said often over the years. Without an ocean or mountains or swamp to block its way, Atlanta has grown since its mid 19th century founding into a vast sprawling carpet of low-density urbanization. Yet most of the horizontal spread of the region happened in the years after 1970, when the influence of planning and the federal bureaucracy was reaching a crescendo. Money for planning and building critical infrastructure flowed abundantly from federal coffers. To some extent, the planning and building of infrastructure was a function of the amount of money available. But in Atlanta the shape of the regional infrastructure was also a product of the relatively quiet work of a succession of public regional planning agencies.

In 1837, long before there was anything resembling a metropolis, the city (founded as Terminus) that sits at the core of the region came to life, when the state authorized a new railroad, named, appropriately, the Western and Atlantic of the State of Georgia, that would connect the Midwest to the Southern Piedmont, carving a path along a prominent north-south ridge that was then known as Peachtree Trail. Burned to the

ground in 1864 during Sherman's March to the Sea, Atlanta reemerged with a new decree when local boosters convinced the Georgia legislature to relocate the state capital from Milledgeville in 1868. And by the end of the 19th century, Henry Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, was wandering the country on the city's behalf, loudly proclaiming the birth of a 'New South', reassuring everyone that white supremacy was alive and well, and throwing open the doors for any and all investment.¹² By the turn of the 20th century, the city of Atlanta had a population just under 90,000; what could be called the Atlanta region had not more than 150,000. Georgia at the time was an agricultural place, but Atlanta was developing an industrial and transportation oriented economic base that would, over the next century, come to less and less resemble the state from which it sprung, and would eventually begin remolding the state in its image. When Asa Candler bought the formula for manufacturing Coca-Cola and brought it to Atlanta, the city was busy expanding its role as a regional distribution center, a factor that would serve the soft drink maker well.¹³ By the time of the stock market crash in 1929, the city had grown to 270,000 people on the basis of an economy of manufacturing, distribution, and services.

Yet through the 1930s, Atlanta scarcely resembled a major metropolitan region on the brink. Though an important distribution point, Atlanta was part of a constellation of inland southeastern cities of modest stature, Birmingham, Nashville, and Charlotte, no place more dominant than another, all minor compared to the region's primate coastal cities, New Orleans, Baltimore, and Washington. Its population was concentrated inside the city limits, and growth occurred via annexation as much as birth or migration. The larger towns surrounding the city, Marietta and Decatur, though connected by streetcar, were still distinctly separate entities, and much of the hinterland in the unincorporated

counties beyond was either given over to cultivation or lay fallow. Many of the old central neighborhoods remained close to their mill village roots, and large swaths of land in the outer reaches of the city were rural. The legacy of immigration, seen in the tapestry of ethnic neighborhoods and social networks in cities like Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Chicago, scarcely existed in Atlanta. Migration to the city had been mostly intra-regional and intra-state, whites and blacks coming from little Georgia towns with names like Tiger, Hahira, and Buena Vista.

By the end of World War II, Atlanta got a big step up from the decision by the federal government to make the city its southeastern regional headquarters, which brought the Malaria Control lab (which became the Centers for Disease Control), a federal reserve bank, the Court of Appeals for the eleventh circuit, and the regional headquarters for a range of other branches of the growing federal bureaucracy. The federal offices provided a strong and stable economic sector, one that would later play a significant role in securing a black middle class and bolstering the region's ability to attract investment in other sectors.¹⁴ The city made its final annexation in 1950, bringing in a large, and largely white, sparsely settled area of land known as Buckhead, which solidified an urban white majority for another twenty years. The end of the war also brought an influx of newcomers. Single-family neighborhoods of inexpensive, 900 square foot cottages and ranchers began filling in the rural spaces in the western and southern extents of the city, spilling over into adjacent unincorporated areas in Fulton, Clayton, Dekalb, and Cobb counties, and small nearby towns like Smyrna, College Park, Forest Park, Chamblee, and East Point. Long, spindly commercial/industrial corridors reached out to the new residential areas. Characterized by modest, low-rise shopping

malls, interspersed with warehouses and small factories, and broad surface parking lots and setbacks of one hundred feet or more from the street, thoroughfares like Memorial Drive, Jonesboro Road, and Marietta Boulevard not only carried commuters to and from work, they became retail and employment destinations in their own right, slowly replacing both older neighborhood clusters and the original central business districts in Atlanta, Decatur, and Marietta, creating a pattern that would be repeated again and again as the region grew outward. When the first segments of the Downtown Connector, the spine of the region's future freeway system, were laid down in 1949, Atlanta was at the beginning of a long march into the countryside, though the looming onslaught of development could only have been predicted by the most wild-eyed boosters. But an inkling of the future shape of the region would soon become visible, finding expression in the activities of a series of regional planning agencies that would assume an important role in shaping the region's physical visage.

MPC and ARMPC

In the years just after the end of World War II, regional planning agencies began to appear in most major cities. Buoyed by the optimism of returning soldiers and the potential for economic growth, these agencies were more often than not promotional mouthpieces of chambers of commerce and business groups. Yet they also performed tasks with long-term effects, most visibly writing and publicizing plans for superhighways and high-speed trains that would connect the old central business district to a future of spacious suburbs, green lawns, and good health.¹⁵ The legacy of this kind of regional planning in the U.S. derives from the work of the Regional Plan Association of

New York and the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) and especially the influential writings of Lewis Mumford, who advocated urban decentralization as a key part of the long term health of American cities.¹⁶ Atlanta first embraced the idea of regional planning agencies when local legislators were able to negotiate a bill through the Georgia General Assembly that established the nation's first publicly supported regional agency, the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC). Though charged with the task of making "a master plan for the orderly growth of the district," the MPC was given little formal authority to coerce its member jurisdictions into recognizing its master plans and should "act in an advisory capacity only". Funded by Fulton and Dekalb counties and the city of Atlanta, money for the MPC was not guaranteed or established by legislation, but depended on annual negotiation between the agency and its constituents. Membership on the commission board was actually tilted toward citizens appointed by the Fulton and Dekalb commission chairs and Atlanta's mayor. Despite these hurdles, MPC went on to publish two relatively significant planning documents, in 1952 and 1954, which envisioned the future Atlanta as a relatively low-density region.¹⁷

MPC was not intended to be a regulatory or legislative body, but rather a proto research organization engaged in a "continuous evaluation of key metropolitan factors" that would provide a sound basis for understanding how the region changed. The first regional agency was designed to make sure that development decisions were founded "on data and projections resulting from this ongoing process," an idea that would have implications for the ARC 20 years later.¹⁸ By 1952 the staff of the MPC had undertaken three years of inventory and analysis, and produced the first regional development plan for Atlanta, entitled *Up... Ahead*. Explicitly limiting the outward growth of the region,

Up... Ahead suggested a planned population and geographic limit for the two-county metropolitan area, restricted to places adjacent to the central city and hemmed in by a circumferential greenbelt, an obvious reference to the London Greenbelt (an idea popularized in the early 1950s) and, more historically, Ebenezer Howard's Garden City.¹⁹ The plan reflected the popularity of urban renewal as a technique for neighborhood stabilization. Maps produced as part of the '52 plan categorized land according to development potential: development areas, mature areas, and renewal areas. Future growth would be pushed to outlying development areas, established neighborhoods would be preserved, and "older, centrally located neighborhoods which have so decline that far-reaching programs of rehabilitation and redevelopment will be required before they can be maintained as good close-in neighborhoods."²⁰ Renewal, of course, largely would be directed toward the low-income, majority black neighborhoods that by 1950 had begun to brush up against the central business district on three sides. The idea of classifying the region into development or preservation areas was retained as the plan went through an update in 1954, an adjustment ordered to reflect the political reality that unlimited growth was to be the preferred future scenario (not artificially limited by planning policies). This was in part a response to the faith in the goodness of growth that flowed through the 1950s, but also a response to the perceived need to provide adequate space for the swelling middle-class, which could not be accomplished by imposing planned limits. The new plan, *Now... For Tomorrow*, thus presented the first version of what would become a standard part of regional planning, whereby continuous population and employment growth would be assumed and actively projected, the only question being where future growth would occur. Significantly, both the 1952 and 1954 plans

contained descriptions of a spoke and hub style limited access freeway system and a parallel heavy rail transit system. The routes of the proposed highways (based on a 1946 highway plan produced by a consultant) proved remarkably prescient over the coming decades: as the interstate highways and rapid transit systems took form, they closely followed the lines first mapped in the early-1950s. Thus while lacking the delegated power to enforce transportation or land use plans, the ideas produced by the MPC were often repeated and broadly disseminated, and resurfaced repeatedly in coming years, providing a useful touchstone for later efforts to expand or transform subsequent planning agencies.

Modern planning regulations, beyond simple zoning, were beginning to be developed by jurisdictions in the region while the MPC was at work. The regional agency helped arrange a number of municipal planning studies for member jurisdictions, and actively cataloged development regulations as they were adopted and implemented. The counties in the region all had zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations by the late 1950s, but long-range land use planning was somewhat less systematic. Records of county level comprehensive planning are relatively scarce. For example, Douglas County paid for a comprehensive land use plan in 1958, before the county was a member of the regional agency, but the plan was apparently not updated on a regular basis. Larger cities within the region, Decatur, College Park, East Point, and Marietta, tended to be more organized, and had all undertaken longer-range planning studies by the mid-1950s, to complement existing zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations. But jurisdictions outside the city of Atlanta employed few professional planning staff, relying instead on assistance from the MPC and the smattering of local consultants in business at the time.

This vacuum of planning knowledge gave the MPC more authority than it might have otherwise had.²¹

Through the 1950s, Atlanta's population grew steadily. Fueled by in-migration from rural counties and small towns around Georgia and surrounding states, the city grew to 487,000 residents by 1960. The greater region, redefined as Fulton, Dekalb, Cobb, Gwinnett, and Clayton counties, reached the one million mark by 1960, though a vast majority of this population was contained in the city and two core counties (Fulton and Dekalb) over which the MPC had jurisdiction. The city was 38% black, the region 14%. The white ethnic neighborhoods seemingly common to industrial cities in the Midwest and Northeast were uncommon, though Atlanta did have relatively large white working class neighborhoods, which comprised most of the southern and western sides of the city.²² Blacks were scattered around the region, with particular concentrations in city neighborhoods just south and west of the central business district, with other population clusters scattered throughout the more rural reaches of the region, reflections of older land settlement patterns characteristic of the Piedmont region of the south.²³ Atlanta was by most standards a relatively small, compact region. Eighty percent of the five county population in 1960 lived in either Fulton or Dekalb counties, and much of this population was relatively well served by transit.

By 1960, decentralization had clearly begun, but was not always quite visible to the average observer. The freeways that would speed cars to new subdivisions were still under construction, the population density was relatively low, and most outlying areas, even within Fulton and Dekalb, lacked the basic infrastructure necessary for significant development. Employment in the region was still dominated by the central business

district and nearby industrial corridors, which saw impressive growth during the 1950s, their positions not evidently threatened by outlying office and industrial parks. The region's first shopping mall, Lenox Square, did not open until 1959, and the airport that would later become a major contributor to the transportation sector of the economy (and the world's busiest) was not much more than a municipal airstrip. In the 1950s, the region's largest protestant congregations, First Baptist and First Methodist of Atlanta (with a combined membership numbering over 10,000) sat near the center of the city, drawing their flock from across the region and commanding wide influence.

Responding to the perception of imminent population and employment growth in Cobb, Clayton, and Gwinnett counties, the General Assembly voted to abolish and replace the MPC in 1960 by a new and much larger organization, the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission (ARMPC). Legislation to create ARMPC was introduced in the Georgia House of Representatives during the 1960 session via a bill jointly sponsored by a tight-knit group of representatives from Clayton County, Cobb County, Dekalb County. It passed by a unanimous vote in the House and Senate, and was signed into law by the Governor in the spring of 1960. ARMPC emerged during a period of state government organization, just as the highway division was ascending to a position of great power by virtue of its being endowed with a permanent trust fund of revenues from the gasoline excise tax.²⁴ ARMPC was intended to be a much larger and more powerful agency than MPC, maintaining the same core tasks but gradually moving into other facets of regional development. Brought from New York, Glenn Bennett was appointed director of the new agency, and was backed by an expanded staff of land use and transportation planners. Producing regional development plans, population estimates

and forecasts, disseminating planning information, and coordinating transportation planning all fell under ARMPC's purview. Importantly, the expansion of the regional agency aligned the planning district boundaries with those of the new Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), an area determined by the Office of Management and Budget. This was intended to allow the regional planning agency to keep pace with evolving federal planning requirements concerning urban transportation infrastructure, and provided the agency a conveniently powerful role in brokering the flow of information and money among member jurisdictions. By 1964, ARMPC had already begun contemplating future expansions, realizing that growth would eventually stretch beyond the five county area, and that the inability to expand might harm the agency's legitimacy.²⁵ Federally determined metropolitan areas attempted to identify coherent urban centers for purposes of demographic data gathering, analysis, policy making, and the distribution of funds. During the 1960s, federal legislation increasingly used these boundaries to reinforce regional thinking and problem solving. Nevertheless, ARMPC predated much of the regionalist legislation, and came into existence without significant federal incentive.²⁶

Like the MPC, ARMPC had limited explicit, formal regulatory powers granted by the state. The power to zone land remained in the hands of local jurisdictions, membership in the agency remained voluntary, and it had no formal powers of plan review.²⁷ Like the MPC, ARMPC set about writing a series of regional plans and engaging in an array of planning activities that would have a broad impact on the shape of the region. But ARMPC also carefully extended its reach, which set an important precedent for the work the Atlanta Regional Commission would later undertake. The

first outcome of this effort, in 1961, was a detailed report on a four line, hub-and-spoke mass transit system that would span all five counties in the region. A refined version of the plan was published in 1962, by which time the state legislature had been prompted to begin the process of changing the state constitution to allow the creation of a publicly-supported, regional transit authority that could then plan, fund, and build a new transit system (this was completed by the General Assembly in 1965). The birth of Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Agency (MARTA) represented an important outcome of the long-term efforts of ARMPC.²⁸ While events leading to the creation of MARTA were underway, the agency produced two modest regional development plans (1962 and 1968), both essentially revisions of the 1954 MPC plan which projected where in the region growth would occur. As a result of new federal transportation planning requirements, ARMPC also initiated a review process for local government applications for federal funds to buy and build infrastructure, a task new to regional planning agencies but one that would later form an important component of ARC's power to coordinate development.²⁹ In 1965, ARMPC, in conjunction with a few other agencies, wrote and adopted an airport systems plan, which established a significant new activity that influenced the long-term consolidation of commercial air service in a single, large airport (a factor that influenced employment growth during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s).³⁰

Despite ARMPC's attempt to consolidate its power, by the late-1960s pressures from different federal policies had begun to pull the agency apart. Though it remained the largest regional agency, its influence slowly eroded. A new transportation coordinating body, the Atlanta Area Transportation Study, and a new council of local governments (Metropolitan Atlanta Council of Local Governments), came on line in

1965. Though ARMPC was ostensibly in charge of both agencies, the channels of communication between them were often clogged. By 1970, the situation was troubled enough that the state legislature, at the urging of a group of regionally-minded planners, administrators, and politicians, agreed to intervene again, acting to pull the plug on all three agencies simultaneously, and create a single new commission in their stead.

Though master plans for a system of limited access expressways appeared in 1946, these roads had not been planned by a single agency, but instead were the orchestration of a loose affiliation of the MPC, the state highway division, and the federal Bureau of Public Roads.³¹ But the 1962 Federal Highway Act and 1964 Urban Mass Transportation Act necessitated changes to create and support an on-going, better-coordinated transportation planning process under the guidance of a single agency. In order to bring the region's transportation planning activities into compliance with federal standards, a new organization was needed that reflected the changed scope of transportation planning. The result was the Atlanta Area Transportation Study (AATS), an agency designed to consolidate and balance the transportation planning process while expanding the number and kind of issues that were considered germane. Under the "direction of the AATS policy committee organized in 1967," the goal of the new agency was to shift "from the originally highway-oriented planning effort to urban mass transit."³² Though AATS was closely connected to ARMPC (which provided staff and office space) its existence and organization sent a mixed message. The study signaled a consolidation of transportation planning in the region, under the umbrella of a single, collaborative organization, but also the fragmentation of an existing regional planning body, driven to a great extent by the changing demands of federal regulation.³³ Yet the

more robust, independent AATS helped direct attention to the looming problem of getting a mass transit system built, providing support to efforts to establish the public transit agency that would become MARTA.³⁴

ARMPC's role in the creation of MACLOG (Metropolitan Atlanta Council of Local Governments) in 1964 represents another attempt to enhance the reach of regional planning. Councils of Government have been popular methods of organizing regional planning efforts, though more often than not have been widely criticized.³⁵ Though comparatively short lived, MACLOG was designed to be an open forum for local elected officials to discuss issues of mutual interest. It was built on the idea that the central part of a successful regional planning agency is a forum for the councils of local governments to come together and coordinate activities. This idea proved to be precedent for the structure of the ARC.

During the 1960s, longer-range planning by counties and municipalities within the region was becoming more widespread. Continuing trends from the 1950s, most Atlanta area jurisdictions adopted more comprehensive, up-to-date zoning ordinances and development regulations by the end of the decade, and a number had already created, or were in the process of creating, long-range development plans.³⁶ The presence of planners on local municipal staffs increased, and as ARMPC's activities expanded so did the level of its involvement in local planning practice. The information dissemination function worked to provide a consistent message that planning for the region would be a high priority, and offered a degree of expertise that could be drawn from when the need arose. With changing federal requirements for regional planning, with nominal new attention being paid to the way land use and transportation interacted, and more money

available from programs administered by HUD, USDOT, and UMTA, setting up and modernizing local planning regulations assumed greater importance. Yet regulations like housing codes were still lacking in most parts of the region, and efforts to enforce the codes that did exist were scattered at best. It would not be until the 1970s, and the rise of ARC, that all municipalities and counties in the region would have a complete set of development regulations.³⁷

Population and employment growth in the region continued through the 1960s. By the end of the decade, the five-county region contained 1,390,000 people and 620,000 jobs, a significant increase over 1960. Growth was beginning to spread to areas outside the five counties, and the population of the central city actually began to decline (though only gradually), amid significant racial churning. By 1970, the city's population had become 51% black, and on the cusp of a major transfer of political power from the old white establishment to the old black establishment.³⁸ Black migration to the city had continued apace during the decade, while middle-class whites were leaving the city and new white arrivals to the region were setting up house in the suburbs without transitioning through city neighborhoods first. The relative concentration of population within the old core, the city and Fulton and DeKalb counties, was beginning to wane, as more residential subdivisions sprouted in Cobb, Gwinnett, and Clayton, though most new population growth remained within the purview of ARMPC. Employment growth in all parts of the region was strong, but the declining share of new jobs located in the central business district portended its fate of declining significance. By 1970, the Atlanta CBD held only 15 percent of total regional employment. Major employment clusters had emerged in Northeast Atlanta, Northwest Atlanta, Buckhead, and Northwest DeKalb,

areas that formed a belt along the recently completed I-285 perimeter highway. Though jobs were beginning to grow toward the edges of the urban core, employment remained strong in places like Southwest Atlanta, Southeast Atlanta, College Park, Hapeville, and Chamblee, where the manufacturing was well represented. Of course, mimicking the national decline of manufacturing, many of those jobs would disappear in the 1970s and 1980s, replaced with white-collar jobs in further-flung suburban office parks and low-level service jobs spread across the region. The massive suburbanization of employment, to places like far northern Fulton County and Northwestern Gwinnett, had yet to happen by 1970, though the signs were clearly pointing in that direction.

Much of the transportation infrastructure that was planned by the MPC in the 1950s was completed under the joint aegis of ARMPC, AATS, and the Georgia Department of Transportation during the 1960s. The stage had been quietly set for a massive transformation of the region. The opening of the urban segments of the three interstate highways that converged just south of Five Points, the center of the CBD and the confluence of five major intra-regional transportation routes, as well as the perimeter highway that formed a 60-mile asphalt band around the city, all happened between 1960 and 1970.³⁹ The fact that drivers had the ability to move quickly within and around the perimeter meant these new roads held significant implications for the way the region would grow over the next three decades. A new airport, just eight miles south of downtown, contributed to the relative accessibility and attractiveness of the region, though did not by itself suggest where future growth would or should occur. MARTA was created in 1965, and succeeded in taking over all mass transit responsibilities from the private Atlanta Transit System. The agency also ostensibly assumed power over

future transit decisions for the four counties that voted by referendum to join (Cobb was the lone outlier, though the county was nevertheless given a non-voting seat on the agency's governing board).⁴⁰ A series of new regional shopping districts were planned and developed between 1960 and 1970, most taking advantage of the accessibility provided by new the expressways. As retail sales shifted from old downtown stores to newer outlying facilities, downtown Atlanta's dominance (real and perceived) declined, despite it being by far the most accessible point by automobile in the entire region. Efforts to improve traffic flow and provide cheap and convenient parking had made the central business district easy to drive to, but did little stem the decline of patronage. The attention the Civil Rights movement put on discriminatory practices by retailers did little to help. By the early 1980s, the exodus of retail businesses from the central business district was well underway. Five Points, once called the Times Square of the South, had begun to feel abandoned and derelict by the early 1970s.

The combined activities of the MPC, ARMPC, AATS, and MACLOG quietly continued a long-term process of regionally planned decentralization. Both embedded within and independent of the local jurisdictions they were designed to influence, these organizations worked quietly, behind the scenes, generating and disseminating information, organizing area studies, bringing local politicians together to discuss planning issues, and providing illustrations of how development patterns should look in the coming years, which helped local jurisdictions develop the modern planning regulations that would come to play a significant role in the way the metropolitan landscape was development to accommodate population and employment growth. Yet, both the MPC and ARMPC were also largely confined to purely advisory roles, with no

guaranteed funding or plan review responsibilities. The long-term importance of environmental regulation or general land use control was only beginning to capture the attention of a wider audience.⁴¹ With the role of the federal government in transportation planning changing rapidly during the late 1950s and 1960s, these agencies had come to occupy an increasingly strategic place. In close cooperation with the state highway department, they were given responsibility for devising plans for where to build new roads and highways, in the process channeling significant financial resources from the federal coffers into concrete projects. Each task, each small activity, contributed in some way to the orchestration of the massive undertaking of building a region. With the rise of more comprehensive environmental legislation, particularly NEPA in 1969, the Clean Water Act in 1972, and the Clean Air Act in 1977, the range of tasks assigned to regional planning agencies expanded considerably, though with an expansion of tasks came an uptick in the overall complexity of managing the demands of different masters.

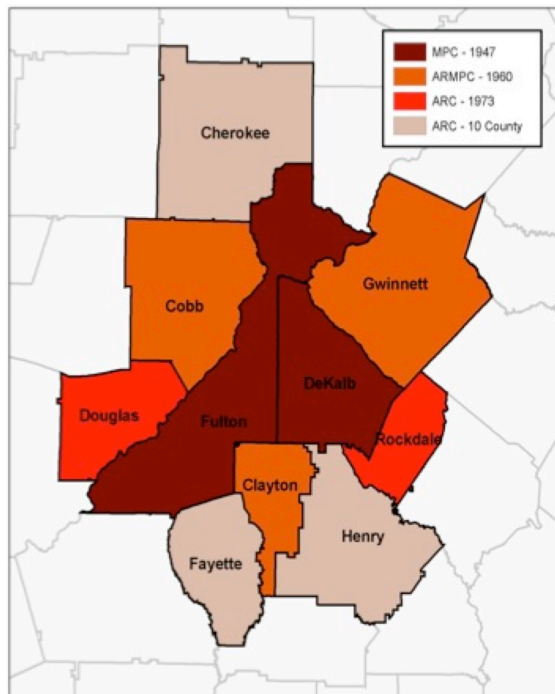


Figure 2.1: Regional Planning Boundaries

Resolving an Impasse

Under pressure to resolve the confusion created by overlapping regional agencies, the American Society of Planning Officials was contracted by ARMPC in 1966 to study the existing condition of regional planning in metropolitan Atlanta and offer

recommendations for improving the process and its outputs. The report made clear some of the problems currently plaguing ARMPC, particularly the indefinite character of its relationships to the AATS and MACLOG. Suggestions revolved around communication channels between the agencies. ARMPC was encouraged to retain for itself responsibility for coordinating regional planning, expand its role in providing professional staff to the other agencies, and continue to manage the dissemination of planning information throughout the region. APSO recommended a reorganization of the ARMPC board into a set of standing committees to make decision-making more effective. Dividing the organization among three committees would in theory increase its capacity to influence development and planning within its jurisdictions. Creating technical advisory subcommittees that included “specially qualified outsiders and top government officials” for each major committee was suggested as a way to make the studies ARMPC sponsors more authoritative. Increasing the size of ARMPC by adding members from the highway and economic development departments and making membership in the agency mandatory for the existing governments were other key suggestions to strengthen ARMPC’s foundation.

In terms of its capacity as a policy-making organization, APSO concluded that ARMPC needed to produce more concise policy statements, summarize them for wider distribution to organizations and governments in the region, and place priority on figuring out new channels for getting its policies implemented by member jurisdictions. Research capacity was highlighted as ARMPC’s greatest potential strength, and the agency should work harder to establish itself “as a central headquarters for research and information on development problems and opportunities within the region.” At the same time, APSO

recommended a decrease in the amount of time the agency spends on annual population and housing estimates, one of its longest-standing activities. In terms of plan review, ARMPC should communicate the criteria it uses to evaluate proposals and encourage local governments to collaborate more closely before and during the formal review. The APSO report recommended regularly scheduled workshops to educate public officials about key planning ideas, more interaction with the local media, and more intensive outreach to the public by commissioners (attending meetings, giving presentations, etc.). Providing technical assistance had been one of the hallmarks of both MPC and ARMPC, but APSO nevertheless recommended a significant reconfiguration of how such support should be delivered, shifting from direct contracts for service to more indirect, capacity-building tactics: model ordinances, personnel advice, and area studies. Finally, suggested revisions to the agency's internal structure would have staff divided into four sections, each dealing with one key substantive area: regional planning, research, intergovernmental affairs, and transportation.⁴²

While the founding of ARC was, at the point of the report's publication, still four years away, the recommendations APSO laid out had many of the structural features that found their way into ARC. What the report revealed, aside from specific issues regarding organization and activity, was the beginning of a concerted effort to centralize regional planning within the confines of a single agency, an effort that was influenced by the evolution of planning as an autonomous profession. The imprint the maturing intellectual heart of planning left on the legacy of the ARC would unfold over time. By 1971, the role of the regional planning agency was set to expand dramatically, driven partly by federal and state policy, but partly by the ability of planning to assert a clear professional

identify, marked by well-formulated ideas about how urban development should be structured, the kinds of information that could be considered valid, and a predilection toward certain methodological practices. What role this expansion in power would lead the agency to play was far from pre-determined, but the structures set up at its founding would persist through its life.

The Georgia General Assembly debated a number of bills and resolutions in the 1969 and 1970 sessions that addressed the need for an expanded and more regulatory form of regional development planning. Responding to federal regulations, especially the 1968 Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, and demographic changes in metropolitan Atlanta, a contingent of house representatives proposed city-county consolidation resolutions (Atlanta - Fulton and Decatur – Dekalb) and a bill to create a new state-level Department of Community Affairs that would oversee planning and community development issues both within and across county and municipal boundaries. Though Georgia had a set of Area Planning and Development Commissions (created in 196?) to help with inter-jurisdictional coordination, state involvement in these commissions was perceived to be rather hands off. The existing State Planning and Programming Bureau, which ostensibly should have been involved in these commissions, was not “properly structured to carry out the functions and responsibilities of an effective community affairs agency” nor was it “properly structured to carry out its [own] functions and responsibilities under the present law which created the Bureau.” Hence, many legislators and administrators perceived that state involvement in planning and intergovernmental coordination was hampered by poor organizational design. Led by Elliott Levitas, Gerald Horton, Harold Clarke, Robert Farrar, Sidney Marcus, and Howard Atherton,

representatives from Cobb, Fulton, and Dekalb counties, the legislators pushing these resolutions reflected a growing consensus that Georgia had been transformed from a state dominated by rural, agricultural interests to one dominated by Atlanta. In 1969, a report to the General Assembly (House Resolution 364) that mandated additional research regarding the need for a new state planning bureau, encapsulated the issue in the first paragraph, noting that in 1960 Georgia had become an urban majority state, and “estimates indicate that the urbanization of the State is continuing.” This resolution reappeared as a bill in the 1970 session that would create a new Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs. Issues emerging as the urbanization process continued revealed “a serious gap between the intensity of the problems facing local governments and communities and the state’s willingness to address itself to those problems.” The passage of the bill establishing the Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs, signed by the tiresome segregationist Lester Maddox, set the stage for a modern agency better equipped to deal with the urban crisis. The new bureau was “created to establish policy and direction concerning state planning and programming and community affairs for the development of the State’s physical, economic, and human resources and to perform such other functions as may be provided by law.” A policy board comprised of the Governor, select members of the House and Senate, and members of the Georgia Municipal Association and County Commissioners Association would govern the overall direction and operation of the bureau, while a permanent staff would be responsible for day-to-day issues. Among specific activities, the Bureau was instructed to produce a State Biennial Development Program, which would “guide State programs and operations in order that such programs and operations shall make maximum contributions” to the development of

the state. The Governor, along with his annual budget proposal, would submit the program to the General Assembly for its approval. Among its regular responsibilities, the Bureau would serve as a liaison between local, state, and federal governments, watching over the money flow and any social and economic problems thereby arising. Deeper into Act 1066, the responsibility for planning devolved to the Area Planning and Development Commissions, whose boundaries the Bureau was responsible for establishing. The area commissions were designed to carry out much of the work of the Bureau, including commenting on local applications for state or federal funds, creating six-year capital improvement schedules, and preparing long-range forecasts of future development. This structure provided a direct connection between local planning activities and the state government, though in an unobtrusive way that left room for considerable local leeway.

The publication of the APSO report and the debate in the General Assembly provided significant fuel to an extended discussion of the fate of ARMPC, AATS, and MACLOG.⁴³ Part of the problem, something the report alluded to but did not say directly, was that the federal government had unfavorably evaluated the regional planning process in Atlanta. In short, USDOT and UMTA, based on requirements included in the 1962 Highway Act and 1964 Urban Mass Transit Act, determined that the existing framework for regional planning was inadequate and in need of significant revision. Atlanta, it appeared, did not possess “a continuing, comprehensive, and coordinated transportation planning process under unified direction.” The transportation coordinator within ARMPC was supposed to direct the staff from GDOT who had been assigned to the AATS and TCC. Apparently, the ARMPC transportation person lacked control over the day-to-day

activities of the professional planning staff (who played a key role in feeding information to the board). The failure of the first MARTA referendum in 1968 was cited as evidence that the transportation staff was neither listening to community priorities nor to each other. The fact that this staff arrangement never worked meant that there was “no centralized direction over the transportation planning process in Metropolitan Atlanta.” Without revision, the region’s ability to receive federal transportation money would be compromised. James Aldredge, who turned out to be rather forward thinking member of the ARMPC board from Fulton County, lead a small, informal group of local elected officials (current ARMPC board members) and planners/public administrators that developed a reorganization plan for the agency that formed the basis of legislation introduced by Horton, Atherton, Thomason, and Marcus into the General Assembly in the 1970 session. The planning agency, as proposed in the bill, would remedy the region’s transportation planning problem, putting all transportation related planning activities under the control of ARMPC’s transportation coordinator by virtue of signed agreements between the governments and agencies involved in the process. The reorganization plan included most of the recommendations outlined in the APSO report, but also offered an expanded role for citizen representation on the planning board, based on a set of new, equal sized districts that cut across normal political boundaries, and power to review local zoning decisions.⁴⁴

This version of the legislation failed, being perceived as handing too much control to non-elected officials and for giving final zoning authority to an intergovernmental commission. Lack of support from most of the mayors and commissioners in the region doomed its chances of passage. In an effort to prepare for another push in the 1971

session, Thomason, Atherton, Horton, Marcus, 5this time joined by Farrar and Cook, introduced a resolution to create a “Metropolitan Regional Council Study Committee,” comprised of six members of the House, to complete a “thorough study of metropolitan problems and the coordination of possible solutions through intergovernmental cooperation.” This set up the introduction of a revised version of the bill, and also gave the potential new bill official standing in the Assembly.⁴⁵ The significance of the defeat of the first version of the bill should not go unnoticed, because it included room for strong citizen representation and regional oversight of zoning, powers that would have more apparently contradicted Atlanta’s reputation as a growth-at-any-cost place.

Picking up after the defeat, Dan Sweat, Harry West, and Don Mendonsa, public administrators/planners from Dekalb and Fulton, took the legislation back to the drawing table, working harder to convince local elected officials of the importance of a new regional agency and revising the bill to respond to their concerns. Holding a series of meetings with affected local governments and members of the legislature to explain and modify the reorganization plan made cooperation possible. Demonstrating “unanimity among the local governments” and coordinating regional acceptance of the Aldredge plan with the introduction of the Horton-Atherton legislation increased the chances of the bill gaining support in the General Assembly. In its new guise, the balance of power on the commission board would give elected officials one more seat than citizen members and zoning would no longer be part of the new commission’s authority. Horton, Atherton, Thomason, Hamilton, Marcus reintroduced House Bill 84, a new version of the failed bill, in the 1971 session.⁴⁶ As the second Horton-Atherton bill creating the agency that would become the Atlanta Regional Commission worked its way through the General

Assembly in the spring of 1971, ARMPC continued its internal reevaluation of the state of regional planning in Atlanta. Drawing on connections between the present agency and its forebears provided useful coherence to the history of regional planning. The work ARMPC did in the 1960s was characterized as a “piece-by-piece approach to detailing the regional plans (1962 & 1968) built on the assumption that the basic objectives defined during the ‘fifties were essentially unchanged.” Staff concluded that the 1970s should begin with a reexamination of this practice, because the “crisis response and piecemeal problem solving” of the 1960s could no longer suffice. Hence the staff advocated the agency to “again take the same type of comprehensive look at the region as it did in the fifties.” The importance of the 1952 and 1954 regional development plans should not be understated. Ideas developed there reappeared in the early 1970s, again in the 1980s, and again in the 1990s, albeit tempered by experience.⁴⁷

Just as House Bill 84 (which would later be signed into law as Act 5) was being voted in the General Assembly, ARMPC staff was busy distributing a model “Regional Policy Development Process” that would guide the work of the new regional agency, thus setting the stage for a new organization that would provide the kind of comprehensiveness that was perceived to be missing from ARMPC. To a great extent, the proposed process had all the trappings of the kind of rational thinking that had long been close to the heart of planning as an intellectual discipline. While challenges to this way of thinking were being mounted from within the ranks of the academy, the dominance of the rational-comprehensive model in practice was virtually unchallenged.⁴⁸ Given this, the staff suggestions for the way the new agency should go about its tasks centered on the notion of a set of long-range goals that should guide the overall

development trajectory of the region. More specific functional goals should follow which categorized issues the agency would focus on, i.e. transportation, water/sewer infrastructure, open space, land use, etc. After functional goals should come policy standards, “unbiased and quantifiable comparisons of alternative plan proposals.” These standards would beget more specific plans, which offer technical activities and short-range policies that could accomplish small pieces of the long-range goals. ARMPC staff valued this course because of its systematic sequencing of steps for moving from a broad plan down to specific actions. A series of technical studies and reports would bolster each of the major substantive issues the agency would address. Without saying as much, staff had suggested a process structure that reflected the intellectual bias of the dominant planning theory of the day. Conveying this structure to the politicians who would actually cast the votes to make the new agency a reality proved to be a critical point in determining what role the new agency would have in the development of the region. Cloaking this structure in a systematic-seeming analysis essentially prohibited competing versions of the regional agency from appearing.⁴⁹

The act that passed the General Assembly abolished ARMPC, AATS, and MACLOG when it created a new, much larger agency (now officially called a ‘commission’). The legislation successfully consolidated functions previously divided among a number of different organizations, but in a more far reaching way than the APSO report had recommended four years earlier. The importance of having a range of regional agencies under one roof should not be underestimated. Responding to both the 1968 Federal Intergovernmental Cooperation Act and the 1969 Act 1066 passed by the Georgia General Assembly, which divided the entire state into 13 area planning districts,

Act 5 designated a “single official metropolitan agency for comprehensive research, studies, advice and review... land use and transportation planning, law enforcement planning, health planning, social welfare planning, planning for parks and recreation, water and sewer planning and similar purposes.” Hence the new commission would also take over regional law enforcement planning, public health planning, and human service planning. Following the boundaries of the SMSA, the commission would be guided by a governing board comprised of the chairman of the commission of each member county, one mayor elected by all the mayors of municipalities within each county, the mayor of the city of Atlanta, a member of the Atlanta Board of Aldermen, and eleven citizens, each representing a specially drawn district. These districts were shaped to encourage “sharing, where by districts are shared by two or more political subdivisions.” Member governments would suggest citizen representatives to the board for approval, a fact that ultimately proved to be both bane and benefit. A career executive director would be hired by the board and would be the key interface between the professional staff and the board. As part of its normal operation, the commission was expected to file an annual report to the Department of Community Affairs outlining the commission’s budget, expenditures, comprehensive planning activities, summaries of area studies, lists of applications for federal funds, local plans reviewed, and recommendations for new legislation. The founding legislation required the agency to “prepare and adopt, after appropriate study and such public hearings as may be necessary, comprehensive development guides for the Area.” It gave the commission authority to review any plan by a local government under its purview if the board determined that the plan would have an “area-wide effect, a multi-community effect, or to have a substantial effect on area

development”, which was defined as “any plan, proposal, or project which involves financing by two or more governments including any of the municipalities of the areas or which involves utility or transportation facilities that extend into two or more jurisdictions.” The review process also included so-called A-95 reviews of applications for federal funding made by any of the municipalities or counties within the commission’s jurisdiction. Research and study of a wide variety of planning and development issues formed an important part of the tasks given the new commission, no doubt inherited from the regional agencies that came before. Financing the commission came from mandatory yearly contributions by each member county and the City of Atlanta. The formula used population estimates calculated as part of the commission’s research activities. Gwinnett, Cobb, and Clayton would contribute thirty cents for each person. The city of Atlanta would contribute eighteen cents per person. Because Atlanta sits astride Fulton and Dekalb counties, both counties were required to contribute twelve cents for each person living in the portion of the City in the county and thirty cents for each person living outside the City. The counties and the city were required to provide the commission an annual \$2,000 bonus, in addition to the standard contribution.⁵⁰ Provision was made for future increases based on inflation.

The introduction of House Bill 84 in the 1971 session of the Georgia General Assembly was spearheaded by a broad legislative delegation from metro Atlanta, many of who had been involved in earlier efforts to pass regional planning legislation, including Atherton from Cobb County, Johnson, Hamilton and Marcus from the city of Atlanta, and Thomason from Dekalb County. It passed the House relatively easily, having received a positive recommendation from the Local Government Committee. But

its fate in the Senate turned out to be more contentious. A number of amendments and amendments to amendments were proposed and voted on during the debate. The center of the apparent controversy over the bill was the relationship of municipalities and the General Assembly in terms of determining membership in the new commission. The House version of the bill did not include language that would allow municipalities to remove themselves from the authority of the regional commission, and voting in the Senate on amendments addressing this relationship was close. One amendment was introduced that would have required the General Assembly to remove any governing authority, county or municipality, from the commission if a local resolution requesting removal was passed. Upon the failure of the first amendment, a second was introduced, and passed, that limited removal from the commission to counties only, though boards of commissioners retained the power to pass a local act requesting removal. An attempt to modify the second amendment by eliminating the possibility of a local act requesting removal from the commission, and thereby reserving total authority for deciding commission membership to the General Assembly, failed. Just before the final up and down vote on the bill, a representative from Fulton County proposed a failing amendment that would have changed the balance of membership on the new commission by giving the larger counties, and ostensibly more urbanized, proportionally more representation. Nevertheless, the final version of the bill that passed both chambers of the Assembly contained much of the authority that the framers had intended. Removing zoning oversight, while important, was an intended concession. More important were the victories, which were numerous. Having membership determined by the state, mandatory funding based on population, the oversight of area plan reviews, responsibility for

comprehensive transportation planning, and consolidating all regional responsibility under one roof represented substantial new bases of power from which the commission could grow, given the proper leadership.

Dan Sweat, hired to be the first executive director of the new commission, played a significant role in the early days of ARC, building a foundation for the agency and beginning the rather arduous task of establishing its role in the development politics of the region. Through the 1960s, Sweat had served in public positions close to the region's political elites, first from his position as Assistant Administrator of Dekalb County, and later as executive assistant for Mayors Ivan Allen (1960-1968) and Sam Massell (1968-1972). Spending his career as an appointed agent, Sweat was able to wield a powerful, albeit quiet, influence on the discourse surrounding the new agency, and then later as director the day-to-day operation of the agency itself. By setting up the new commission as a comprehensive regional planning agency, which would include land use, transportation, water, sewer, Sweat helped reinforce the legitimacy of the infant agency, extending its reach in ways that ARMPC had been unable to. At the time of his appointment as executive director of ARC, Sweat was the chief administrative officer of the city of Atlanta, having served as a liaison to ARMPC and been deeply involved in the committee that came up with the reorganization plan. Earlier, Sweat had been a key player in events that engendered regional planning and coordination in metro Atlanta. Through the 1960s, Dekalb County was one of the fastest growing counties in the U.S., adding employment and population at a dramatic pace. Because it shared a long border and a portion of the city of Atlanta with Fulton, Dekalb passed from suburban to urban quickly, absorbing both white and black migration from the city and countryside, and

later a significant share of international immigration. Most of the growth in Dekalb happened in unincorporated places. The county government began to assume responsibility for providing water and sewer infrastructure, which effectively remade the county into a full-scale urban service provider, much like a city. Working through public utilities, using water, sewer, and road infrastructure to set aside industrial and commercial districts, as well as brokering the opening of undeveloped sections in the southern part of the county for increased black and white suburbanization, Sweat helped Dekalb plan its growth, setting something of a precedent that other counties in the region would later follow, at the same time setting himself up as a key player in local regionalist conversations.⁵¹

Sweat did not operate in a vacuum. The individuals that helped push the legislation creating the new regional commission involved a collection of public administrators and state assemblymen who worked together on regional issues with a level of foresight and ambition of substantial force. Though a number of federal regulations during the late 1960s required prescribed demonstrations of regional collaboration, transportation most prominently, the deeper collaboration that happened during the formation of the ARC was in part stimulated by the voluntary effort of “a set of professional public administrators who worked together” on the ground, conversing about day to day issues.⁵² At the time, finding new ways to coordinate at the regional level, mostly via city-county mergers, was a national issue for public administrators and planners, who were plugged into professional communication channels that allowed information flow from agency to agency. Moreover, clearly defined networks between the local professional staff and elected officials provided a means for feeding ideas into

the political system responsible for moving new legislation forward, affording the professional staff influence over the form the new commission would take.⁵³ Sweat reflected on this in an interview near the end of his life, noting that by having “all these agencies under one control,” the new commission represented the fruition of the work of an old cadre of public administrators and allied elected officials. The agency of this particular group of individuals mattered. As Sweat described them, they came from the ranks of local governments of historically meager means, which only functioned because the administrators figured out how to “wire [the government] together with baling wire and scotch tape.”⁵⁴ This kind of statement alludes to a bootstrap mentality among the professional bureaucrats in the region, characterized by a tenacity that would end up paying significant dividends.

Like its predecessor agencies, the new commission lacked explicit authority to enforce laws related to development or to operate transportation systems or fulfill other typical municipal functions (specifically zoning), though it was given the ability to establish contracts with both the state and member municipalities to provide professional services of an unspecified nature.⁵⁵ Despite the inability to control local zoning, the things the agency could do held promise. The basic framework of the commission provided a remarkably durable foundation.⁵⁶ Its size, breadth of function, and relationship with the state, reflected in the mandatory nature of its jurisdiction and funding, gave ARC long-term security and stability. County or municipal membership was not optional, nor was the contribution of money toward the commission’s budget. With authority derived from the A-95 review process, the commission would be able to monitor the flow of federal infrastructure funds into the region. Ultimately, each of these factors had a long-

term effect on the way ARC carved out its role in the planning and development process and can be related back to the agency's ability to sustain and reinforce itself.

Perhaps as much as its organizational structure, the role Dan Sweat played in the early days of the ARC, the first two years of the organization's life, and the four years of negotiations and discussions that lead to its creation, left a permanent imprint on the way the commission would function in the coming decades. Sweat was both a public administrator and an effective political operator, serving most of his career at the pleasure of political bodies. He straddled the old central city regime and the new regional commission, bridging the downtown businesses that governed Atlanta between the end of the Second World War and the late 1960s and the rise of the large public agencies that would guide the region beginning in the early 1970s.

After Charlie Brown, representing the Fulton County Commission, called the other commission chairs together to initiate the new agency, they worked quickly to hire a consultant to help put together operational policies and procedures, selected citizen members, decide on a name, and elect Ernest Barret, Commission Chair of Cobb County and a long-time champion of what would be termed "regional statesmanship," chairman of the fledging agency. The new Commission voted to hire Sweat as executive director shortly thereafter. During the years under the leadership of Sweat, funding for the commission grew rapidly. Recalling ARC's early financial condition, Sweat remarked in 1996 that "[m]oney was not a problem. Money – we had money running out of our ears." One of the first regional planning agencies in the country to have a guaranteed funding stream, ARC hired 135 employees over the course of its first two years in operation. Between the beginning of 1972, when the commission opened for business, and the end

of 1973, when Sweat resigned, the annual budget grew from \$1,711,000 to \$2,862,000, a two-fold increase. By 1975, the budget had reached \$4.7 million.⁵⁷

The Bureaucratic State

Jimmy Carter, who would later become President of the United States, was elected Governor of Georgia in the fall of 1970. While not portentous on its surface, Carter's assumption of the chief executive position ushered in a period of substantial change in state government, change that touched ARC by reshaping the political context into which it was born. Most directly, Carter signed Act 5 in 1971, which brought ARC to life, but more importantly he helped modernize and consolidate the state bureaucracy, compressing a complicated and vast set of patronage-based political fiefdoms into a more professional public instrument. As Carl Sanders had before him, Carter understood the significance of institutional structure, as well as the art of public relations, and how much the Governor could influence the way public agencies operate.⁵⁸

In his inaugural address to the General Assembly, Carter sought to characterize his upcoming term by bluntly declaring that civil rights and fairness would be embedded in the business of the state. Carter had recognized the changes to the legal underpinning of Georgia's political system created by the federal civil rights legislation of the 1960s, and knew that changing the rules by which government decisions are made would confront, and hopefully bury, the ugly legacy of discrimination⁵⁹ But Carter's emphasis on civil rights was also intended as an acknowledgment of the changing demographic dimensions of the Democratic party's base of political power, an effort that extended to appointing more blacks to positions of power in state government than any governor

before. Though less newsworthy than his public remarks on civil rights, Carter's agenda of organizational reform, directed toward transforming the state's handling of conservation, budgeting, and the judiciary, had far reaching effects. He oversaw the creation of the Georgia Heritage Trust and the Metropolitan River Protection Act, and the reorganization of the Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources, accomplishments with implications for later efforts to strengthen the hand of planning in regulating development, which would prove important to ARC's viability. All of this change came amid a period of political tumult in the state, as the last of the old demagogic segregationists, Lester Maddox, left the Governor's mansion in 1971, and the Arthur Anderson consulting firm was brought in to offer advice on modernizing the state's bureaucracy.⁶⁰ Yet the full effect of Carter's effort would only be fully realized in future policies. Carter's reorganization responded to shifting requirements emanating from the federal government, but by streamlining and professionalizing state agencies responsible for carrying out federal policies, he helped create an environment that fostered a stronger regulatory stance by the state concerning issues that had previously been the domain of counties and municipalities, and in many instances ignored.

The transformation of metropolitan Atlanta represented the leading edge of change, the place where much of the attention of the reorganized state and new federal policies would be focused. Results of the 1970 census showed that the five county metropolitan area had grown to 1.4 million people. In response, the federal Office of Management and Budget expanded the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) to seven counties in 1973, and the state legislature promptly brought Douglas and Rockdale into ARC's fold.⁶¹ The idea that metropolitan Atlanta would have 3,000,000 people by the

dawn of the 21st century spread widely during the early 1970s, coming on the heels of the Census.⁶² Media hullabaloo over this growth came from different directions, presenting a mixed message of the old boosterish vision of the future metropolis and doomsayers' prognostications over the ecological inability of the region to house so much projected future growth. The city of Atlanta was by then majority black and on the cusp of electing its first black mayor. Though its total population had declined, the city could be more accurately characterized by the intensity of its racial churning. With the end of de jure segregation, working class neighborhoods that stretched through the southern and western extents of the city were rapidly flipping from all white to all black. The public school system turned as quickly.⁶³ At the same time that the city's black population was growing, the white population in the counties ringing the city was beginning to surge. Between 1950 and 1970, the five counties surrounding Atlanta added 670,000 new residents, the vast majority of them white, which translated into a dramatic decrease in the overall proportion of blacks in the suburbs. As suburban counties grew, the relative concentration of the region's population was begin to fall. In 1970, the share of the total regional population living within Fulton and Dekalb counties still amounted to nearly 75%, but that number would drop rapidly in the coming years.

At the beginning of the 1970s, development along the perimeter freeway (I-285), the last segment of the regional interstate highway system to be completed, had begun to accelerate. The completion of the highway served as a catalyst. Three regional malls, Northlake, Perimeter, and Cumberland, spread in an arc along the northern side of the circumferential highway, opened in 1971 and 1972, beachheads for what would become major employment and retail nodes. The region's first large-scale mixed housing

subdivisions, constructed as planned unit developments (PUD), began popping up during the same period. Combining detached single-family houses, condominiums, and apartment buildings, these new PUDs were the size of small towns, and though sitting in unincorporated parts of suburban counties required municipal levels of service. Such major housing developments helped propel population growth in suburbs, which was driven much less by out-migration from the city than the decision of in-migrants from other parts of the state and region to move straight to the suburbs, bypassing the older circuit of city-neighborhood-to-suburban-subdivision progression. At the same time, a commercial and office construction boom was accelerating in the central city, fueled by a lingering urban renewal mentality and the work of CAP, which remained intent on maintaining the central business district as an attractive place for middle-class whites to shop.⁶⁴ Major mixed-use developments in the central business district and Midtown, including such iconic structures as Colony Square and Peachtree Center, were under construction by late 1971, and proposals for a number of other large buildings had been approved.⁶⁵

ARC's entrance into the rapidly growing metropolitan area and an expanding state bureaucracy was both beneficial and challenging. Various factions in Atlanta's business and political circles had been hungry for growth for a long time, as had the state, which usually meant paying little mind to the externalities that growth produced. The regional agencies that preceded ARC were simple in their design, intended to support the desired growth, and ended up helping shape Atlanta into a low-density, regional city, a collection of roughly equal sized political jurisdictions whereby the population of the urban core and surrounding suburbs stood in balance. The hand of the federal

government in shaping the region was obvious, particularly in the limited access freeways funded by the 1956 Highway Act (and subsequent updates). But freeways by themselves do not create sprawl or decentralization. The freeway system in Atlanta was essentially complete by the late 1960s, yet development patterns remained constrained. Suburban growth had begun, but development in the central city had not vanished. The kind of abandon and demolition seen in places like Detroit, St. Louis, and Camden never appeared. Population in the central city declined, but not more than 15 %, and large sections of the city remained stable.⁶⁶

Regional planning agencies do not by themselves create or inhibit the growth that brought new jobs and people to the region, but they have a hand in shaping where and how this growth gets allocated because of their position in the chain of command. As key through put organizations, they pass information and money to and from different levels of government, like conduit. The structure of such an organization, who it serves, how political geography is represented, sources of funding, and the tasks the for which the agency is responsible are important, and stretch beyond simple regulatory powers. In the case of metropolitan Atlanta, the structure of the regional planning agencies, beginning with MPC and ending with ARC, present an unfolding story of steadily increasing sophistication, size, and complexity. Membership in MPC was limited to two counties, and though publicly supported, the agency was required to negotiate its budget annually with its members. Staff was small and put most of their time into writing two long-range plans. When ARMPC arrived in 1960, both geographic scope and professional staff expanded, as did funding. But the work the agency did remained limited, and by 1964 ARMPC had effectively fragmented into three overlapping and

competing agencies. With the founding of ARC, these regional functions were consolidated, membership and funding became mandatory, and new day-to-day regulatory powers emerged as a key part of the agency. But beyond the details of what the agencies actually did, the successive iterations reflected a particular combination of local politics, state involvement, and federal interest in planning and development. The evolution of the agencies also reflected the changing social and economic character of cities and suburbs, the increasingly intricate ties between them, and the shift in discourse from city to region. Moreover, each iteration of the regional agency reflected the growth of planning as a distinct professional activity, with an identifiable intellectual perspective on the character of urban places and ways that those places should be designed and built. Ideas about regionalism were branches of an old strain of planning thought, but until the migration of individuals trained in planning into different branches of the public bureaucracy, those ideas remained relatively obscure.

While regional planning in metropolitan Atlanta has not always been particularly visible, the role of the agencies responsible for planning has been significant, largely because of the way those agencies have been structured.⁶⁷ Where one activity started and stopped, and what factors lay behind, became increasingly difficult to discern. The work of the agencies could scarcely be disentangled from the context in which they existed, the boundaries between them consistently blurred. In the day-to-day, the characteristics of the organization would dictate how the agencies performed their assigned activities. As a result, much of the internal discussion and debate, particularly leading up to the creation of ARC, centered on details of organizational structure. Along with growing more sophisticated and larger, the progression from MPC to ARC included a steady expansion

of power and scope. What began as a purely advisory and visioning agency was turned into a regulatory and policy making body. The agency that resulted would be governed by a board comprised of county commissioners and citizens appointed from districts that were drawn to purposely counter the inertia of existing political boundaries, but the number of elected members would be one more than the number of appointed members. Each member was given a single vote. The board would set broad policy for the commission and serve as a political liaison with local governments. It would conjure camaraderie and inter-political conversation among its members. Yet professional staff would perform most functions, including generating information that would be provided to the board in support of its policymaking activities. The ordering of staff divisions within the agency reflected an attempt to create a framework that would outlast individual administrators and encourage substantive coordination among staff, as did a provision that gave the commission authority to take up additional planning activities as the need arose.

The mingling of organizational issues with substantive activities can be seen in both the requisite duties conferred by a litany of federal planning laws and three locally derived functions expressly written into the ARC legislation. These local functions propelled the agency beyond minimum federal planning requirements: area plan reviews, federal funding application reviews, and data collection/analysis. The first was the review of plans with area-wide implications (a determination that ARC itself made). Area plan reviews were devised in order to give ARC formal entrée into cross-jurisdictional debates, both for municipal and county plans as well as plans produced by utilities or other public commissions. If a planning project was deemed an area-wide

plan, it would be submitted to ARC, which would alert other public agencies that might be affected (neighboring counties or municipalities, utilities, water/sewer providers, GDOT) and give them time to formally comment on the plan. If any plan or proposal was judged inconsistent with regional plans or policies or any affected public agencies, a conference would be called to attempt to resolve the conflict. If a resolution could be found, the plan would be returned to the submitting jurisdiction and the project could proceed. If no resolution emerged, the ARC Board would pass a resolution transmitting the board's official position along with staff comments to the submitting jurisdiction.

The second was the responsibility for reviewing and commenting on local applications for state or federal financial assistance (according to requirements established by individual federal granting agencies). In Act 1066 (1970) and Act 5 (1971), ARC was designated the single contact point between federal and state funding agencies and local governments (in accordance with the requirements outlined in OMB Circular A-95). Any application for money had to pass through the commission, which read the application, compared it to the goals of existing regional plans and policies, and then made official comments as to the application's merit. In the case of applications for federal money, the commission's comments served as the official comments of the state. ARC then forwarded a record of this review process to the respective federal or state granting agency.

Third was a set of more general tasks, defined as a "continuous program of research, study, and planning" that could include land use, transportation, solid waste, parks and open space, law enforcement, and health, among others. Other important tasks, including making population estimates and forecasts, providing a forum for cross-

boundary discussions by public officials, and opening channels for information dissemination were the result of the state law that created the Bureau of Planning and Community Affairs and the Area Planning and Development Commissions. The sum total of these activities, federal transportation planning, area plan reviews, special planning studies, and population/employment forecasts, formed a base from which the agency expanded. Much like branches of a tree, other major activities ARC assumed during its first decade of its life, economic development, housing, and law enforcement planning for example, all had their roots in this initial set of tasks.

Membership and funding were inextricably linked from the birth of the commission, forming a tight relationship, influencing and influenced by the organizational structure and the substantive tasks central to the agency. The nexus between the two was extremely important to the new commission's long-term viability. Too little funding can limit an agency's effectiveness, while too much can encourage inefficiency and lack of focus. Voluntary membership can be used as a carrot to encourage participation, but can lead to abandonment in moments of conflict.⁶⁸

Between 1947 and 1960, the provision of funding was steady but subject to year-to-year changes in terms of amount. MPC was required to negotiate a yearly budget with the participating counties. With ARMPC, contribution levels from member governments were set by the state. Membership in both regional agencies was only encouraged by the state, not mandatory, though participation by jurisdictions, at least on paper, remained consistently high. Nevertheless, in the 1971 legislation, membership in the new regional commission was formally mandated, and annual financial contributions were established, calculated according to a per person rate. Local government funding would be based on

annual population estimates, which ARC was responsible for calculating, and would not be subject to negotiation. Federal money supporting regional planning was abundant during the 1970s, funds that could be used to bolster ARC's operations but also money ARC was given to distribute to its member governments.

Different fund origins created tension over the policy directions the commission would take. On one hand baseline funding for the agency was local, which set up certain expectations among local governments, while on the other hand the majority of the money flowing through the commission came from the federal government, with its own set of requirements (each federal program and policymaking body had stipulations – often different – attached to the money it distributed). As Harry West remarked in 1983, “ARC has many different masters.” Whatever the effect of having different pots of money simultaneously available, the stability of the arrangement of mandatory membership and funding stands without question, and persisted long after Reagan's rollback of federal support for regional planning in the early 1980s.

The federal Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968 and the creation of the Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs in 1970 opened new avenues for regulating regional development. The hand the state took in regional and local affairs reflected the governing transformation that happened during the early 1970s, when state agencies became more aggressive in identifying and managing resources that belong to the state. The shift brought about by these policy changes was at least one reminder of the coming end of Atlanta's three decades of regime politics, as the diffuse network between elected officials and influential downtown businessmen ceased to be the single explanation for the shape of development in the city, and the city ceased to be the

determining incorporated entity in the region.⁶⁹ Replacing the old arrangement was a larger and more powerful collection of public agencies than had been known in the 1950s and 1960s. A professional bureaucratic corps staffed the new agencies, and it had a mind for using political channels to pursue its own ends.

In metropolitan Atlanta, Dan Sweat and his cadre of contemporaries symbolized the new bureaucrat, trained public administrators/planners who operated in the seam between bureaucratic and political channels to ensure ends as close to a professional ideal as possible: more coordinated regional planning, a strong central business district, and protection of environmentally fragile resources.⁷⁰ The rise of these agencies was typified by the founding of the Atlanta Regional Commission in 1971. The work the commission would do over the course of the next three decades was influenced by the legacy of its forebears, its structure (tasks, membership, funding), and the relationship of the staff to the political process. These factors would be reflected in the subtle way the commission positioned itself in the regional development process.

¹ Atlanta History Center, Atlanta Regional Commission Collection (ARCC), Letter from Jas Aldredge to Nelson Severinghaus, January 6, 1971

² White, Dana and Tim Crimmins, "How Atlanta Grew: Cool Heads, Hot Air, and Hard Work," *Atlanta Economic Review* (January-February, 1978)

³ Between 1971 and 1979, ARC's annual operating budget grew from \$1.7 million to \$3.1million. See ARCC, "Annual Report," 1972, 1980. Regarding the issue of convening governments in order to foster coordination, see Davis, William, "From the Director," *Intergovernmental Perspective* 20, no. 3 (1994). The issue of coordination and convening is also reflected in ARC's documents. See ARCC, MSS 619, Box 117, "A Matter of Much Importance," 1967; ARCC, "The Planning Process, Narrative by Tom Roberts," 1972; ARCC, "Review Manual," 1980; ARCC, "The Unique Role of the Regional Council Administrator, by Harry West, Executive Director of the Atlanta Regional Commission," 1981

⁴ Atlanta History Center, From Mule to Marta (FMM), Box 124, Folder 3, "Interview with Walter Douglas," August 5, 1977

⁵ Popper, Frank, "Land Use Regulation Since 1970," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 54, no. 3 (1988)

⁶ For a short overview of the founding of ACIR in 1959, see McDowell, Bruce, "Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations in 1996: The End of an Era," *Publius* 27, no. 2 (1997)

⁷ The report of the Douglas Commission describes the relationship of minority neighborhoods in central cities and surrounding white neighborhoods using a metaphor of a "white noose." See *Building the American City: Report of the National Commission on Urban Problems* (New York: Praeger Press, 1969) p1

⁸ For a discussion of the creation of ACIR, see William Coleman and Delphis Goldberg, "The Eisenhower Years and the Creation of ACIR," *Intergovernmental Perspective* 16, no. 3 (1990)

⁹ For a brief discussion of the ACIR over its history, see Bruce McDowell, "Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations in 1996: The End of an Era," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 27, no. 2 (1997), p111-114; and "ACIR at 35: Achievements in Perspective," *Intergovernmental Perspective* 20, no. 3 (1994).

¹⁰ Examples of reports and studies published by the ACIR include *The Problem of Special Districts in American Government*, May, 1964; *Metropolitan Social and Economic Disparities: Implications for Intergovernmental Relations in Central Cities and Suburbs*, January 1965; and *Building Codes: A Program of Intergovernmental Reform*, January 1966.

¹¹ Among the state legislators who supported Act 5 (which created ARC) were Elliot Levitas, Howard Atherton, Gerald Horton, and Sidney Marcus.

¹² See Joel Chandler Harris, *Joel Chandler Harris' Life of Henry W. Grady Including His Writings and Speeches* (New York: Cassell Publishing, 1890)

¹³ Franklin Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1969); Frederick Allen, *Secret Formula: How Brilliant Marketing and Relentless Salesmanship Made Coca-Cola the Best Known Product in the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995)

¹⁴ For a nice retelling of local history and a discussion of the role of federal jobs in securing middle class status for blacks in the early 20th century in Atlanta, see David Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn* (New York: Schribner, 1996)

¹⁵ See Mark Solof, "History of Metropolitan Planning Organizations," *NJTPA Issue Report* (January, 1998)

¹⁶ Robert Fishman, "The Fifth Migration," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 4 (2005)

¹⁷ Act 230, "Fulton and Dekalb Metropolitan Planning District and Commission," *Acts and Resolutions of the State of Georgia*, 1947

¹⁸ ARCC, *Up... Ahead*, 1952, p2

¹⁹ ARCC, MSS 619, Box 44, "Regional Planning for Metropolitan Atlanta: A Fresh Start" prepared by the staff of the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission, March 1971.

²⁰ ARCC, *Up... Ahead*, 1952, p14

²¹ ARCC, *Douglas County Land Use Plan*, prepared by Eric Hill Associates, 1958

²² For example descriptions of white ethnic neighborhoods common to industrial cities in the first half of the 20th century see Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Chapters 1 & 7 and Gillette, *Camden After the Fall*, Chapters 1 & 2. For a discussion of Atlanta's white workingmen's neighborhoods, see Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, Chapter 3, and Kruse, *White Flight*, Chapter 2.

²³ See Larry Keating *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2001), Chapter 3.

²⁴ Resolution 158, *Acts and Resolutions of the State of Georgia, 1960*

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- ²⁵ ARCC, “Summary of Findings and Recommendations”, Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission, 1964
- ²⁶ ARCC, MSS 616, Box 117, “Strategy for the Seventies”, 1967
- ²⁷ Act 847 “Atlanta Regional Metropolitan Planning District,” *Acts and Resolutions of the State of Georgia, 1960*
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, p12
- ²⁹ The 1962 Federal-Aid Highway Act mandated regional coordinated planning in conjunction with receiving federal highway funds.
- ³⁰ Jennifer Pinson, “Atlanta Hartsfield International Airport: A Case Study of Urban Public Policy Conflicts,” MA Thesis (Emory University, 1982)
- ³¹ These agencies worked through something called a Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), which was an ad hoc group responsible for funding the highway planning process.
- ³² ARCC, MSS 619, Box 77, “The Atlanta Area Transportation Study” 1968
- ³³ ARCC, MSS 619, Box 44, Diagram of regional transportation planning in Atlanta, 196?, shows the number of different agencies involved in the AATS as well as the relationships among them.
- ³⁴ ARCC, “Memo from William Maynard to Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee”, November 23, 1970.
- ³⁵ See William Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1997) Chapter 6.
- ³⁶ ARCC, “Profile of Local Governments Served by the Atlanta Regional Commission”, 1974
- ³⁷ ARCC, “Construction Codes in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area: A Survey of Current Practices, Section D: Housing Codes” 1974
- ³⁸ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places In The United States,” Population Division Working Paper No. 76, U.S. Census Bureau (2005). For a much more in depth discussion of the role of race in the electoral politics of the city, see Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*; Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*; Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn*; Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*; and Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*. Much has been made of the role of race in the city’s politics, and though it remains important, there is a different discussion of the role of regional planning in the transformation of the city and suburbs into a metropolitan region.
- ³⁹ ARCC, MSS 619, Box 117, “Expressways”, 1978
- ⁴⁰ For more complete, but still insufficient, discussions of the multi-year process of creating MARTA, see Keating, *Atlanta*, Chapter 6 and Kruse, *White Flight*, Chapter 9, p248-251.
- ⁴¹ For an introduction to a longer discussion of the rise of the environmental movement and its connection to suburbanization in the post-War period, see Adam Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*, Introduction.
- ⁴² ARCC, MSS 619, Box 1, “Summary of Recommendations of American Society of Planning Officials and Summary of Response of Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission”, June 1967
- ⁴³ *Atlanta Constitution*, August 14, 1969
- ⁴⁴ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the state of Georgia*, “House Resolution 663-1368,” 1970; ARCC, MSS 619, Box 1, “Minutes of Joint meeting of Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission and Atlanta Area Transportation Study Policy Committee”, January 6, 1971.
- ⁴⁵ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the state of Georgia*, “House Resolution 1003,” 1970
- ⁴⁶ Dan Sweat Collection, Box 2, folder 2, “Outline for Presentation to Staff of Atlanta Regional Commission,” April 26, 1972

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- ⁴⁷ ARCC, MSS 619, Box 44, "Regional Planning for Metropolitan Atlanta: A Fresh Start," prepared by the staff of the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission, March 1971
- ⁴⁸ There had been a number of attacks on the rational-comprehensive model of planning by 1971. The most famous was Alan Altshuler, *The City Planning Process: A Political Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965) and Paul Davidoff, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 31, no. 4 (1965).
- ⁴⁹ For more discussion of the how planning theory had evolved to this point, see Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, Chapter 10.
- ⁵⁰ ARCC, "Letter from H. Aldredge to Nelson Severinghaus", January 6, 1971.
- ⁵¹ GGDP, Box P-1, "Dan Sweat Interview by Cliff Kuhn and Shep Barbash," November 20, 1996, p45, 46, 49, 50
- ⁵² "Dan Sweat Interview," December 2, 1996, p18
- ⁵³ In the series of interviews of Dan Sweat by Cliff Kuhn and Shep Barbash, Sweat discusses the role of career public administrators in developing the ideas for ARC and pushing those ideas through the legislative process.
- ⁵⁴ "Dan Sweat Interview," November 20, 1996, p48
- ⁵⁵ "Dan Sweat Interview," December 2, 1996, p40
- ⁵⁶ In the 1990s, the commission's role in the regional planning process would be challenged from a number of different directions, but it managed to flex without breaking or losing its place. See Chapter 7 for a recounting of this period.
- ⁵⁷ ARCC, "Annual Report of the Atlanta Regional Commission," 1976
- ⁵⁸ Robert Behn, "Leadership Counts", *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 8:3 (1989)
- ⁵⁹ *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, "Inaugural Address by James Carter," January 12, 1971
- ⁶⁰ See Gary Fink, "Jimmy Carter and the Politics of Transition, 1971-1975," *Georgia Governors in an Age of Change*, edited by Harold Henderson and Gary Roberts, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).
- ⁶¹ For a more general discussion of the Office of Management and Budget's role in setting the framework for federal data collection, see Julius Shiskin, "Recent Developments in Federal Statistics," *The American Statistician*, December (1971).
- ⁶² See Bruce Lindeman, "The Future of Atlanta," *Atlanta Economic Review* (August, 1971).
- ⁶³ For a discussion of white flight and public schools see Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) and Kruse, *White Flight*, Chapters 5 & 6.
- ⁶⁴ For the best discussion of this phenomenon see Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta 1946 – 1988*, Chapter 3. Stone documents the way the downtown business elites were preoccupied with insulating downtown Atlanta from perceived black intrusion. They used a variety of methods, but most cleverly wield federal money to build infrastructure barriers between the central business district and the black neighborhoods that surrounded it on three sides. These accounts, however, do not address regional events outside the boundaries of the central city.
- ⁶⁵ *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, November 21, 1971.
- ⁶⁶ Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," Population Division Working Paper No. 27, U.S. Census Bureau (1998)
- ⁶⁷ Fred Bosselman and David Callies, *The Quiet Revolution in Land Use Control* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972); Popper "Land Use Regulation Since 1970"; Richard Walker and Kevin Heiman, "Quiet Revolution for Whom?" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 71, no. 1 (1981)
- ⁶⁸ William Fulton's in depth accounts of the condition of metropolitan planning in Los Angeles during the same period highlights what can go wrong when membership and funding remain voluntary. See Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis*, Chapter 6.

⁶⁹ See Stone, *Regime Politics*, Chapter 8.

⁷⁰ GGDP, Box P-1, "Dan Sweat Interview by Cliff Kuhn and Shep Barbash," November 20, 1996.

Chapter 3

The 1975 Regional Development Plan

Introduction

Founded in 1971 as a response to changing federal policies, state politics, and local concern, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) represented an attempt by the Georgia legislature to counteract perceived political fragmentation in the state's primate metropolitan region. The ARC not only consolidated responsibility for a variety of planning activities under one roof, but also helped channel the growing array of federal and state development policies through an explicitly regional prism. Though the Commission grew out of a lineage of regional organizations, it represented a break from its predecessors, in terms of size and budget, as well as magnitude of responsibilities.¹ Because of these changes, the function and role of regional planning bodies like ARC in the post-1970 regulatory context has been significant, though the details of the legacy of these organizations remain unexplored.

At its inception, the state legislature handed ARC responsibility for preparing region-wide development plans and monitoring development activity for the counties that formed the Atlanta metropolitan area. Federal regulations dictated that the responsibilities of the agency should also include reviewing local transportation and

environmental plans connected to the expenditure of federal funds. The result was the creation of a metropolitan governing infrastructure, both physical and political, that connected city and suburb in a sticky web that allowed ostensible political differences to coexist within a context of tacit coordination. Perhaps as important as the substantive areas over which ARC assumed jurisdiction was its capacity to gather and disseminate a steady flow of information related to planning and development, through meetings, seminars, training sessions, reviews, and publications. The quasi-research function had been part of Atlanta's first regional planning agencies, but never to the degree realized in ARC.² Moreover, a stable collection of participants in the process ensured that discussions among politicians and planners were focused on a consistent set of regional topics, establishing a predictable context and conduit for key planning ideas to be disseminated and contested. In this respect, regional planning played a critical role in the production of metropolitan Atlanta's sprawling landscape.

The Seventies

The beginning of the 1970s engendered a stereotypically boosterish fascination within the local media of recounting Atlanta's startling growth during the 1960s, and equally enthusiastic declarations of what the coming decade would bring in the way of new development. In early January 1970, just as the state legislative session was getting underway, a Sunday edition of the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* ran a special section dedicated to reminiscing the history of the region from its origins as a small railroad crossing to its then-present status as a major regional distribution center. Though Atlanta's two daily papers had long been downtown institutions, allied with the interests

of the old elites of the central business district, their perspective on the character of the region was beginning to change.³ Debates in the 1968, 1969, and 1970 legislative sessions of the General Assembly had turned a spotlight on the issue of how metropolitan Atlanta was changing, both economically and demographically, and what this meant for the balance in political power between traditional urban and rural rivals, when confronted with an emerging suburban voting block. It was widely recognized that redistricting based on the results of the decennial census would produce significant changes in the power of the metropolitan caucus in both branches of the Assembly, and with it the relative weight greater Atlanta would carry in state government.

Somewhat independently both the *Journal* and *Constitution* realized this in the way they presented the discourse in the recent legislative sessions, and both grabbed onto the idea that not only was Georgia now essentially an urban state, dominated by urban concerns, but that its primate city, Atlanta, had become a metropolitan region where the distinctions between city and suburb were growing both sharper and blurrier. The migration of middle and working class whites out of the central city and into new, single-family subdivisions behind suburban county lines coupled with the migration of lower income blacks into the southern and western quarters of the city was producing the kind of urban spatial inequality identified in reports issued by Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Affairs, the Kerner Commission, and the Douglas Commission. In spite of this churning the total population of city barely budged, and the region's growing labor market remained centered in the city (if not in the old CBD), meaning that the whites who left, and the growing number moving into the region from other places, would still be returning to the city everyday to go to work. The bottom line was that

Atlanta remained the place of employment and recreation for a majority of suburbanites. Thus the *Journal* and *Constitution* could remind readers that amid political bluster about suburban rebellion, “there remains a spirit of cooperation between Atlanta and its sister cities... [because] Atlanta’s problems are their problems, for they are, in a sense, Atlanta itself.” Nowhere was this cooperation more visible in the early 1970s than in the circle of legislators and public administrators involved with planning and development.⁴

Among metro Atlanta planners, politicians, and developers, widespread preoccupation with the changes washing over the region animated discussions about how the demographic transformation of the region would be translated into the built environment. The implications of these changes for the professional bureaucracy at the heart of the ARC signaled modification of the issues that should be included plans, and how those plans should be constructed. The financial impact of these changes on the economics of land development pushed the stakes of local and state politics higher. Hence the regional discussion turned to deciding how future development should be framed in order to be both palatable and profitable. The topics included and excluded in this discussion provide insight into how planning for the region would be structured. The new Atlanta Regional Commission seized on the importance of shaping this discussion and was able to commandeer the regional planning process by first establishing itself as the central information agency for the region, a base from which to build later expansions.

Accordingly, one of the first two major tasks the newly formed Atlanta Regional Commission undertook was writing a regional development plan (RDP). Recalling the optimistic plans of the 1950s, particularly the Metropolitan Planning Commission’s 1952

plan, *Now...For Tomorrow*, the dawn of the 1970s brought with it a sense of a need for a rebirth of grand, comprehensive visions, guided by the availability of state-of-the-art data analysis techniques and broad thinking.⁵ Along with the watershed plan undertaken to protect the Chattahoochee River from excessive encroachment, the process of writing the new RDP was one of the tools the commission used to position itself as the new center of regional planning activity. By virtue of the scope of the new plan, which involved a lengthy process of data collection, analysis, and policy development, the process of writing the new RDP proved to be a platform for publishing and disseminating reports describing and analyzing the region in detail. As the regional planning process flowed forth, with ARC controlling a strategic vantage point between local governments on one side and the state and federal governments on the other, the realization of the power of managing the flow of information became a key step in the commission's evolution. In these early days, ARC signaled its transition from the more timid demeanor of its predecessors (MPC and ARMPC) to a more aggressive, professional agency.

Organizing a New Regional Plan

In early 1972, ARC officially began work on its new Regional Development Plan (RDP), which was expected to be completed and adopted by the beginning of 1976. The plan was positioned as a "benchmark in an ongoing planning process," and presented as a major investment in the tradition of regional planning in Atlanta, dating to the early plans of the MPC in 1952 and 1954. Conceived as a general document that would guide the development of the region over a twenty-five year horizon, the format and flow of the '75 RDP reflected many of the duties charged to ARC upon its creation in 1971 (which

reflected the procedural recommendations provided by the 1967 APSO report that laid out a strategy for reformulating the agency). As directed by Act 5 (1971), ARC intended to produce a plan that met the requirement of creating periodic development guides for the region. The new RDP was intended to be useful for around 10 years, but to be updated earlier if need arose. The resulting document would be divided up based on the substantive areas over which ARC had jurisdiction: land use, transportation, environment, social services, and aging. Thus in a single, unwieldy effort ARC attempted to integrate the basic concerns of the specialized agencies that it had absorbed in 1971, meshing the demands of local and state governments with the array of federal transportation and environmental regulations that were to be included in the regional planning process.⁶

Though the subjects necessarily included in the plan spanned a broad range, the crux of the RDP and the planning process ended up focusing on environmental and transportation policies with clear infrastructure implications.⁷ Land use, social services, and aging were pushed to the outside edge of the core concern of the document. At least some of the plan's focus on infrastructure could be attributed to requirements that RDP policies be in sync with other, often parallel planning activities supported by federal funds, namely those concerned with roads/transit and water/sewer. As a result, the plan was written in broad terms, vague, open enough to allow local municipalities flexibility in adopting and implementing different policies as they saw fit. Yet this proved to be a key characteristic of the plan and the ARC itself: it allowed for regional coordination without dictating local behavior directly.

The Regional Development Plan that emerged resulted from a process that involved a complex set of interactions. Though the document ('the plan') itself was significant, the activities behind its production turned out to be critically important to the way the plan was perceived and the effect its policies would have. On its face, the 1975 RDP looks simple and reads coherently. But the plan sits atop a process that involved significant action on the part of the growing bureaucratic staff, and a rather vast collection of stakeholders: local planners, politicians, developers, businesses, and citizens among them. In total, this process produced over 100 studies, reports, papers, public meetings and hearings, each reflecting an amalgam of demands from different directions, detailing small pieces of the plan, including data, land use, transportation, housing, openspace, watersheds, social services, and airports. Guiding this trove of studies from afar were the hands of local, state, and federal governments, visible in the topics the studies covered but also in the analytic methods deployed. Policies originating at different governmental levels and within different regulatory agencies required different kinds of data, used different measures of performance, and measured compliance using different standards. Stakeholder concerns and expectations varied depending on point of view. The combination of these influences shaped the resulting plan in ways obscured from view, particularly the complicit but convoluted relationship between the bureaucratic staff and the political bodies responsible for formally endorsing the legitimacy of the plan.

Yet among this myriad of background activities produced by the regional planning process, population and employment projections achieved a level of influence beyond any other. Among all the issues that emerged in the 1975 RDP, projections were

discussed and contested by almost everyone involved. During the three years over which the process unfolded, population and employment projections became a central and highly contested issue, assuming a level of independent power that influenced the overall shape of the process. To say simply that population projections were the primary factors in the RDP process would be misrepresenting the complexity of regional planning. Yet in the case of Atlanta, the power stemming from gathering and organizing a vast body of information and projecting that information into the future influenced the overall shape of the planning process, structuring the discourse and conversation that surrounded the specific development policies that resulted.

In the context of planning the metropolitan landscape, where policy directives from different directions were converging simultaneously, the idea that projections could rise to the top of the process is perhaps not surprising. The specifics of the Atlanta case, the changing standards of professional planning, the transformation of federal policy, and the character of local implementation combined to reinforce the role projections played. As publicly financed metropolitan planning efforts expanded across the country during the 1970s, motivated by the availability of federal funding, regulatory intervention, and increased computing capacity, the role of projections and forecasts in the planning process grew considerably. In time, population and employment projections became among the first activities a municipality or regional agency undertook in the process of planning future development.

In ARC's attempt to create data-driven plans and policies, using a numbers-don't-lie calculus, projections were treated as the outcome of a rational process. In the course of writing the RDP, the output numbers were used for a variety of purposes, but none

more important than as justification for reviewing and selecting one development policy over another. Though required as part of the planning process, that the projections influenced decisions about development policy reflects both how the rational-comprehensive process of planning actually worked.⁸ In some sense, planners came to depend on the veracity of small area projections for validation of the existence of the process itself.⁹

When it was created, ARC was directed to produce annual estimates of the region's population and employment, an activity of importance to the state and the agency. Compiling and analyzing population and employment data was important because of its direct link to financial resources. Many federal programs tied the distribution of funds to both the state's total population and the portion of its population located in large urban areas, like metro Atlanta. Moreover, each ARC member county was required to make annual fiscal contributions to the agency based on a specified rate per person (which was calculated based on annual population estimates). Slotted into the commission's research division, the process of doing projections and estimates was conceived as a technical activity, and largely existed within the domain of professional staff functions.

By the time ARC came along, large-scale urban models, capable of processing ever-larger quantities of social and spatial data, had been part of regional planning in the US for almost two decades.¹⁰ The models, using mathematical representations of urban processes of varying degrees of sophistication, gathered data from a number of different sources as inputs, and then processed the information with predefined algorithms. The output was a set of growth forecasts. These forecasts showed the future distribution of

population and employment by census tract, and also what future traffic and land use patterns might look like as well, if certain development policies were assumed. While the urban allocation models reduced the complexity of the metropolitan region to a comparatively small set of variables, their utility (and popularity) lay in their ability to project the distribution of population and employment at defined intervals of years, far into the future, with an air of objectivity. With the availability of federal money to support such technical tasks reaching new highs, ARC used a large-scale model extensively in the 1975 RDP process.¹¹ Not only did the model provide a beneficial air of objectivity, the legwork of gathering and cleaning data, adapting a projection model to the local conditions, calibrating the model, calculating projections, and turning the outputs into useable information (all part of the process of prepping the model) helped establish ARC's role in the production of key regional information. No other agency in the region, aside from the state, possessed the resources to do such work. With its urban model, ARC effectively monopolized the market for regional data analysis, which turned out to be a strategic position. As a result of the stature afforded the data analysis function in general, and the estimates and forecasts more specifically, a certain technical sophistication adhered to the heart of the agency.

In part, ARC's initial orientation toward producing quantitative measures of regional issues was necessitated by the federal and state policies that framed the work the Commission did, but another part was the prevailing professional sense of how the regional planning process should be rationalized, a result of the standards of planning education of the day and the co-evolution of regional planning agencies and large-scale urban models.¹² Urban models were first developed and tested by regional agencies like

ARC, which gave them a foothold in the regional planning process that would grow over time. Continuous advances in computing power made working with large data sets easier. New techniques for projecting and forecasting economic and population change soon followed. With technical prowess came a level of assumed veracity, an impression that had to be managed carefully to be effective and sustained. Thus the quantitative character of the work of ARC and its projections set a course for how thinking about growth and development would be structured in metro Atlanta over the subsequent decades.

Setting ARC's Long Term Agenda

During the 1975 RDP process, the first under the aegis of the new agency, ARC was a young organization operating in a challenging political climate. Though the Commission inherited a lineage of public planning, the validity of its existence, in part perhaps due to the publicity surrounding its creation, was often debated. As legislation creating the agency was making its way through the General Assembly, questions about the legality of a dramatically expanded regional agency had been raised repeatedly, by legislators, county commissions, and a few citizens. Did it have a constitutional right to exist? Was the agency a super-government that would eventually supplant local elected commissions? Though both the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* supported ARC, both papers frequently referred to it as an umbrella government, an awkward choice of phrase that likely exacerbated local suspicion.¹³ But ARC and its backers decided to attack this as a publicity, rather than legitimacy, problem. By expanding citizen involvement in the work of the commission, the assumption was that questions about its status would be

effectively answered without having to explain in great detail what the Commission would actually do.

In crafting its response, the agency engaged a rather lengthy outreach process during 1972 and 1973, publishing a monthly newsletter publicizing its work, and holding a number of open public forums around the metro area to answer constituent questions (citizens and elected officials) face to face. The responses during these events varied, though turnouts were dreadfully low. One sparsely attended forum held in Marietta (the seat of Cobb County) in the early winter of 1973 illustrates at least some of the responses the Commission received from the general public, as well as the kind of resistance ARC sometime faced from a few vocal members of its constituent governments. After introductory remarks concerning the origin of the legislation that helped create the commission, the agency was attacked by a few vocal members of the crowd as being a front for an effort to create a Marxist government. Another resident claimed that the concerns of Cobb County were entirely separate from the rest of the region, and therefore the agency had no authority under which to act.¹⁴ Though common and easy fodder for the media, these reactions can be read as being as much of a function of the newness of the agency, and a general misunderstanding of what role it would be playing in the region, than as a broader grassroots rejection of its existence.

Metropolitan Atlanta was undergoing significant change during the early 1970s, adding population and employment at a rapid pace, though, provoked in part by the oil crisis, its future seemed increasingly volatile. The reality that an economic slowdown was percolating throughout the region by the end of 1973 confronted the expectation, long held dearly by Atlanta's leaders, that growth would continue unabated, as it always

had, never mind the national economy. After all, the region had weathered previous economic slowdowns quite ably, hardly showing the signs of distress so apparent in other places. While new development had boomed during the first three years of the decade, punctuated by the completion of several new regional shopping centers, prospects for the middle 1970s appeared much less certain. Observers and forecasters straddled a line between unequivocally predicting a continuation of the boom and exhibiting caution.

The contribution these prognosticians make to the general perception of future economic conditions counts for quite a lot in the business of land development. The value of pontificating on future development was enough that Atlanta's two most prominent developers, Tom Cousins and John Portman, weighed in on the discussion in an opposing pair of op-eds in a Sunday edition of the *Journal-Constitution* in late 1974. Providing some insight into the thinking of developers across the region, both men emphasized the necessity of maintaining the vitality of downtown Atlanta, helping middle-income families move back into the central city, and improving transportation. Responsible for developing several of Atlanta's most significant projects (the Omni, Colony Square, Peachtree Center, among others), Cousins and Portman expressed guarded optimism in the region's ability to continue growing, despite the economic downturn.¹⁵

In part, apprehension over the region's economic future was driven by shifts in the distribution of population. The city of Atlanta had become majority black in 1970, and was on the cusp of electing its first black mayor, events that encouraged rampant speculation about the impact demographic changes would have on the future development of the region. Research Atlanta, a non-profit, business-friendly socio-

economic research organization bankrolled by the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, had compiled a report detailing the region's demographic changes during the 1960s and early 1970s, noting that while outlying areas, unincorporated parts of Dekalb, Cobb, Clayton, and Gwinnett had seen significant population growth, the city itself, for the first time, had not. Moreover, the central city increasingly appeared to be home to only the very rich and the very poor, a situation many observers assumed would hold potentially destabilizing consequences. Other agencies, like Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), a private, non-profit planning organization supported by downtown businesses, under the direction of Dan Sweat after he resigned as director of ARC, weighed in on the potential negative effects of the on-going demographic transition of the city.¹⁶ Middle class whites were vanishing, and the middle class black households that replaced them typically had access to a smaller array of financial resources.¹⁷ Since the economic vitality of the downtown office and commercial submarket was assumed to be connected to the fortunes of the white middle class, and downtown was assumed to be an important determinant of the region's overall health, the changing racial makeup of the city alarmed many of the organizations involved with development and planning. Questions lingered as to what role downtown Atlanta would play in the metropolitan economy, especially considering its decline as a regional shopping center.¹⁸ Even more damaging was the perception that downtown was becoming dangerous to the average worker or visitor.

Related to the discussion of demographic change was the old conversation about how the metropolitan region should be governed (which played prominently in the legislation that created ARC). Form of governance remained important because it realized so many assumptions about the relationships between municipal bodies, and had

long been a topic of hand wringing among politicians, planners, developers, and the public. A legacy of the regionalist thinking of the 1920s, a key issue in Atlanta had for many years revolved around the power of the city to annex unincorporated areas adjacent to its borders without a referendum among the people living there. The *Plan of Improvement*, negotiated in 1951, established parameters for the official relationship between the city and Fulton County concerning the provision of essential public services, but beyond being a simple contract for services between the city and county, the document outlined a path to a future city-county consolidation, which would form the basis for a decidedly more regional government.¹⁹ Annexation of adjacent unincorporated areas by the city or consolidation of the city and county government structures would offer incremental advances in levels of coordination. Even more radical proposals, also legacies of the debates that swirled around the creation of ARC, advocated the creation of a full-scale regional government that would supercede existing county and municipal jurisdiction. These ideas were not the work of organizations on the fringes of the region, but rather business groups, mainstream non-profits, elected municipal councils, and members of the state legislature. In 1974, Atlanta Chamber of Commerce president Ivan Allen III (scion of one of Atlanta's elite families) publicly advocated for local government consolidation. In late 1975, the Chamber attempted its own form of region building by putting into place a series of suburban branch offices to establish a collaborative relationship between the concerns of central city and suburban business interests. Initially resisted by the local chambers of commerce, this regionalist beachhead eventually morphed into a powerful metropolitan-wide business advocacy group.²⁰

But the idea of transforming the politics of planning and development in the Atlanta region reached beyond chambers of commerce, local politicians, and bureaucrats. State wide electoral politics also played a significant role in giving rise to this discourse. Efforts to reorganize and modernize state government begun by Jimmy Carter (and carried forward by succeeding Governors George Busbee, Joe Frank Harris, and Roy Barnes) helped create a context that reflected and supported the rising power of the state and the importance of regional institutions like ARC. The growth of metropolitan Atlanta foretold that the region would assume considerably more power over both its own fate as well as the greater fortune of the state. The requirements for distributing federal money required increasingly intensive involvement by the state bureaucracy, which necessitated an expansion of the state's role in allocating the money set aside for infrastructure. In short, the financial stakes for controlling the political reins of the state were high, provoking a fight that would be played out in the committees and subcommittees of the General Assembly, as well as imprinting the work of ARC and its effort to produce a new plan for the region.

Carter's struggle to modernize state government unfolded against the backdrop of a longer-term negotiation between the old rural legislative forces and a rising urban caucus that had been emboldened by significant reapportionment gains in the General Assembly, first in 1960 and again the 1970. While reapportionment helped the urban caucus prevent the passage of laws with obvious detriment to the region, the power of rural legislators remained substantial, often presenting roadblocks to the free passage of legislation that would obviously benefit Atlanta.²¹ This tension was especially apparent in

the areas of transportation funding and environmental policy, issues of utmost importance to the rapidly urbanizing counties surrounding Atlanta and the RDP process.

Environmental quality, embodied in the newly created Department of Natural Resources, represented perhaps Carter's most ambitious push, but one that would not be fully realized until the middle of the 1980s. Though the proper extent of environmental regulation was often debated, the basic thrust was toward a much greater role for state agencies concerned with the natural environment. For instance, the Clean Water Act in 1972 opened a massive spigot of money for wastewater infrastructure so that municipalities could improve the quality of urban water bodies (through secondary sewage treatment systems), but the act mandated state involvement in planning and construction new facilities.²² Mirroring the debate in the U.S. Congress about national land use policy, Carter used his reorganization program to set a path toward more aggressive state-level development planning, building a commission to "recommend an over all growth policy" for the entire State. Comprised of a cross section of elected and appointed officials, the commission included several individuals who would become key participants in the successful effort to introduce statewide growth management legislation in the 1980s.²³ In fact, the condition of Georgia's surface waters (a long-simmering issue) sparked a number of new policy fronts that connected transportation, land development, and water quality, ultimately providing grounds for intensified efforts to legislate mandatory comprehensive planning in cities and counties that had previously known no such thing. Carter's interest in opening a conversation about planning at the state level was related to his broader support of the interests of metropolitan Atlanta and recognition

of the fact that Georgia had become, seemingly overnight, a state thoroughly dominated by urban concerns.

The social, economic, and political context into which ARC's first RDP was thrust provides clues as to how participants in the planning process conceived their efforts, why the plan would take a particular form, and why the relationship of population projections and development policy was so significant.

Population Projections and the RDP

In many respects, the confluence of forecasted growth and planning policy was crystallized in the first sentence on the first page of *Framework for the Future*, a policy document published by ARC in early 1975 that laid out the results of the population and employment forecasts that would form the core of the final version of the regional development plan that would be published a few months later. Together the RDP and *Framework* became both primary and secondary means of disseminating the projections and inscribing them throughout the planning process. The projections reported were based on the overall assumption that "an additional 2 million people will live in the 7-county Atlanta Region in year 2000."

Beginning in early 1972, the first of several iterations of the population and employment forecasts was developed using a then state-of-the-art computerized regional activity allocation model (named EMPIRIC). While large-scale urban models were widely known among planners, the details of how the models work remained confusing and still required explication for the many non-experts involved in the planning process. These details were laid out in 1972, in the *Study Design for Development and Application*

of *EMPIRIC Activity Allocation Model*, and the first projections from the model were published in 1974. After a six-month period of comment and debate, revised numbers were published in early 1975. After several more months of discussion, ARC officially adopted the revised outputs in late 1975, just before publication of the RDP. The projections presented a clear case of the region's expected growth and the direction that growth would take over the coming three decades.

Afforded a prominent place in the final version of the RDP, reference to the forecasts appeared early and often in both the planning process and the plan itself.²⁴

The relationship of EMPIRIC and its output to planning policies emerged out of a context in which the idea of planning was considered more important than plans or policies themselves. As early as 1954, the metropolitan planning agency that preceded ARC had begun to abandon the idea of writing plans that restricted growth, and instead to engage what was often called a continuous planning process that hinged on rudimentary forecasts of future development. While little more than a germ in the mid-1950s, the idea that growth projections could serve as a framework for effective regional development planning expanded dramatically during the 1960s.²⁵ In the case of Atlanta, the extensive effort put into creating population and employment forecasts in anticipation of the 1975 RDP was to some extent an extension of an earlier forecasting project.

The most concrete evidence of the emergence of a model-based planning process appeared in 1962 in *Atlanta Silhouettes*, a publication that had been prepared by the regional planning agency (ARMPC) that predated ARC. *Silhouettes* attempted to provide a detailed numeric compendium of what the region would look like twenty-five years into the future. Widely distributed among local governments and development agencies,

these projections were a vivid demonstration (using the local context) of the practice of using detailed data to model the connection between existing conditions and anticipated future conditions to guide the development of intermediate planning policy. In other words, past trends could be used to construct a believable future, which would lead to policies that responded to those expectations. These early projections played an important role during the period leading up to the founding of ARC, and were mentioned frequently during the preparation of the new model.²⁶

The idea driving the use of activity allocation models, considered objective applications of technology to the problems of regional planning, was to replace some of the art that had characterized earlier regional planning efforts with a numerical foundation. During a period when the application of quantitative social science methods to social problems was popular, large-scale urban models offered the possibility of a more scientific ground for the planning process, one founded on hard data, derived from real conditions, and that held out the promise of impartiality.²⁷ Though relatively sophisticated for its day, the EMPIRIC allocation model did more or less what other models did: quantified changes in population and employment and tied them to changes in the geographic area dedicated to different land uses. Descriptions of the EMPIRIC model emphasized its technical ability to inform three necessary planning tasks: 1) forecasting population, employment and land use; 2) assessing the impact of policy decisions; 3) coordinating analysis of alternative policy decisions. By simultaneously taking into account transportation infrastructure, water/sewer improvements, zoning regulations, and the amount of developable land, the model calculated a rudimentary

measure of population carrying capacity for different areas within the region based on the mixture of land uses likely to prevail in the future.

EMPIRIC projected population and employment figures for the years 1980, 1990, and 2000 by dividing the metropolitan area into 290 districts and 34 superdistricts (aggregations of districts). Depending on location and population density, the districts were based on both 1970 census tracts and traffic analysis zone boundaries (subsections of census tracts). The baseline data used in the model came from 1961 and 1970, and included total population (Census), total employment (Census), existing land use (ARC), and the number of new housing and demolition permits (Counties) issued by jurisdictions within the region. Once outputs were produced for the districts and superdistricts, each district was categorized according to four broad development categories (core, mature developed, rapidly developing, and satellite), which were meant to be more general, more easily understandable, descriptions of the future built environment of the region. The categories were determined by the existing mixture of land use types (e.g. single family residential, industrial, commercial, etc.), anticipated levels of growth, and the expected mixture of future land use. Each district would be assigned to one category and each category was expected to receive a certain density level of future development. The subarea projection outputs were also aggregated by development categories, allowing for a broadly painted picture of the future urban landscape of the region.²⁸

A key factor of the EMPIRIC model was the way it chained forecasts based on previous years. How a particular sub-area of the region had grown in the past, represented by both the landscape category it was assigned to and past population and employment trends, was a strong determinate of how the model would show the

distribution of population in the future. Using a share of growth technique, the model first projected changes in the total population and employment of each superdistrict as a share of the projected growth of the region as a whole (which was derived from projections of the state's growth). The numbers then were disaggregated into districts.

The share of total projection technique was used in part because of its relative simplicity, but in the case of metro Atlanta it tended to produce uneven results. Subareas that had grown a little faster than the region as a whole showed tremendous gains through year 2000, while those that had grown a little slower showed significant decline during the same period. While the projection assumptions were loosely guided by a few key development regulations, the model's cognizance of the details of the policy landscape was relatively crude. Its output was shaped by the inclusion or exclusion of only a few constraints. These included the amount of developable land, existing development density, water service availability, and average travel time between residential and employment zones (home-based work trips).

The output of the model managed to be both specific and vague simultaneously. While it showed future population gains and anticipated distributions of land use at the district level, and revealed areas around the region where future growth was likely to occur, the model paid too little attention to the effects that minor alterations to development policies might produce. This problem was compounded by the way individual policies were bundled.

Bundling policies was a way of narrowing the field of possible future development scenarios, a decision that was made as part of the modeling process.²⁹ In 1972, ARC developed three alternative policy packages for metro Atlanta at the

beginning of the RDP process. These scenarios were carried through the process, until one was selected for official endorsement by the Commission board. Transportation infrastructure was the key differentiating factor in each scenario. The first presumed growth and development trends would simply continue unabated, existing policies and regulations and infrastructure unchanged. The second envisioned the construction of an extensive mass transit system with comparatively little development of the freeway system beyond what existed in 1970. The third envisioned a limited rail system and a highly developed highway and collector road system. Embedded within each alternative was a collection of smaller policies that provided the modelers with more subtle controls to alter the dimensions of the projections. These policies could be added or removed to reflect desired adjustments. The small policy controls included measures of transportation accessibility, of developable land, and permissible building densities. These policy levers allowed planners to slightly tweak the model at different points in the projection chain, changing development standards mid-stream, releasing or removing developable land in different years, and testing the effect of the construction of new towns or other major regional developments.³⁰ Yet even with fine tuning, the time-series nature of the model meant that identifying trends in the data lent itself to projections of a future that clung closely to the past, which itself was a way of determining possible planning outcomes. Even though they allowed a certain amount of manipulation by the participants in the planning process, the scenario packages, presenting only a few alternatives, shaped the order in which planning policies could be presented.

Allocation models like EMPIRIC proceed along a fine line between rigid and flexible, coupling the plasticity of changeable inputs with the reliability of a standardized

set of steps. This often means that models can be guided to produce outcomes that fulfill certain basic expectations but at the same time remain somewhat unpredictable when confronted with the complexity of a decision making context that depends on the actions of an array of loosely related actors. While the relative flexibility of the model allowed for a degree of fine tuning, producing an arguably more realistic vision of future development, it also opened more room for negotiation.

Because of the rigidity of the projection method at the heart of the model, the relatively small development policy inputs that were available could only partly influence the magnitude and direction of the model's output. Thus the decision about which development scenario best captured the region's trajectory, and less the small policies that were included, was critical to the output of the model. Yet because of the 25-year projection horizon (as opposed to a more reasonable 10 year horizon), significant differences in the built environment eventually accumulated from the rudimentary tweaking the model could accommodate. Policies that gently restricted the amount of developable land, for instance, ended up showing shrinkage in the geographic extent of the projections; those that opened more land for development expanded them. The combined effect of the policies within the model scenarios produced uneven and often confusing results. The places within the region that the model projected gains or losses often conflicted with common sense. For example, the model suggested that a key population and employment node in the region, Buckhead, would decline in total population, despite generous development regulations, high density ceilings, and the high property values in place at the time the projections were created.³¹ In effect, the model

could not adequately capture the way that development regulations would be expected to operate.

Framing the smaller decisions about which policies to include and which to exclude in the design of the model was a single directive that coursed throughout the model and the regional planning process itself: the notion that growth, in terms of population, employment, and land development, should be the “heart of the planning process”. Growth became simultaneously policy and vision. To a great extent, the role of growth in Atlanta fits the description of the growth machine developed by Logan and Molotch in their widely cited book, *Urban Fortunes*. The preoccupation with population and employment growth, and associated development of the built environment, has surely the affect of increasing “aggregate rents and trap[ing] related wealth for those in the right position to benefit.”³²

Yet, the issue of growth and who benefits was neither so one-dimensional nor a concern limited to land holding elites. Growth had become part of a general discourse within planning, and the respect and prominence attributed at the outset of the process to the role population forecasts should play was good evidence. As much as they were a fascination of local politicians and landowners, the urban model and the forecasts of future development it produced were also expressions of the growing intellectual sophistication of planning practice. With such tools at its disposal, planners had worked their way into important positions within the interstitial complexity of the regulatory infrastructure emerging at federal, state, and regional levels. By virtue of putting emphasis on using models and forecasting as necessary steps before policy development took place, a planning process that was in many respects a marvel of technical

sophistication ended up extending and reinforcing the idea that envisioning growth was good.³³ These conditions had the effect of entrenching the population, employment, and land use forecasts at the center of the regional planning process, which introduced an iterative cycle of considering and re-considering what the model outputs predicted at nearly every step in the process of creating the development policies themselves.

Though the results of the allocation model held a significant place in both the process and the document from the very beginning, there was no conspiracy, though there was a healthy dose of politics. In other words, there was no clear, pre-determined outcome that the model would foretell, established beforehand by a cabal of interested parties. As it happened, the relationship between growth projections and planning policy evolved during the creation of the RDP, revealing a labyrinthine path from a few initial assumptions to the final draft of the plan. The openness of the process (a reference to the plan as a social experiment, not the level of public participation), the number of actors involved, the evolving political and regulatory context, and the role of the planning bureaucracy meant that an unobstructed path from the beginning of the planning period to the final output would have been an impossible expectation. Yet decisions about the order of events did indicate a level of conscious shaping of the decision making context so that a general range of outcomes could be predictable, evidence of which could be found in the effort to construct the process so that policy decisions flowed from forecasts, not the other way around.

During the RDP process, the sequence of policy debate always returned to the projections: how much growth the forecasts indicated and where they indicated this growth would occur. Discussion of specific policies followed, but they were structured

by the magnitude and location of future population the forecasts had first suggested. This pathway served to simplify the task of deeming a particular policy realistic or not. The policies that formed inputs into the scenarios included in the projection model were constrained by their adherence to planning tools already established and recognized in the state of Georgia, thereby limiting the scope of the model. More specifically, the discussions during important early phases of the RDP process purposely ignored policies or planning ideas without strong precedent legal groundwork in the state, whether or not those policies had been implemented in other states or discussed in the planning literature. As a result, an explicitly slow growth scenario was excluded from consideration. The case for such an exclusion was carefully worded: “[t]here is little or no point in constructing scenarios – involving for example the withholding of large amounts of land from development – if no realistic mechanisms exist for implementing them in the real world.” This way of conceptualizing those planning policies that should be considered and those that should be excluded made for a convenient and effective trope. If a scenario included regulations that had not been tested in Georgia, or that represented a substantial leap from existing policies, it was simply excluded.

These criteria for evaluating potential policies were reproduced in a number of reports, becoming a mainstay underpinning policy discussions during the process. By establishing a system of planning based on future scenarios that were tied closely to forecasts, policies as seemingly simple as relieving traffic congestion and conserving residential land could only be considered as part of a larger package. As a result of this clustering effect, simple policies were turned into complicated decisions with fateful consequences for the shape of the landscape.³⁴ The sequence of decision making,

excluding and including clusters of policies in the RDP based on the demands of the model, demonstrates how closely projections and policies operated in the RDP process, and how the forecast-based regional planning process actually unfolded.³⁵ The quiet, technical power of professional planning carried the day, even if toward ends that were ultimately at odds with some of the professed goals of planners (mass transit, environmental protection, compact development).

Starting from an expected total regional population of 3.5 million, which was based on the combined population of the counties that comprised ARC's planning jurisdiction, a figure that was itself derived from a proportional share of the state's total population as forecasted by the Census Bureau, the model had moved recursively through an array of data to produce a story of coming changes in land use, employment, and population. In addition to the federally mandated reasons for using a quantitative model, the political expediency of perceived objectivity in a contested planning process managed by a new agency made for an easier job of selling the resulting plan to politicians and the public (if any were actually paying attention).

The future that the final version of the 1975 RDP forecasted was a seven county region knitted together by freeways, arterials, and a 50-mile long heavy rail system. The plan called for reinforcing a spoke-like transportation pattern cinched together in the central city, with a lower-density residential landscape expanding in a broad concentric ring around the urban core. But perhaps most significantly, the EMPIRIC outputs visualized numeric projections in real space, which enhanced their power and influence considerably. The rudimentary outputs from the EMPIRIC allocation model were gathered into a series of visualizations of this pattern.

EMPIRIC showed projected changes in population as changes in the overall development patterns of the region, which, when completed in 1974 and 1975, were presented as maps and graphs depicting future development. At first, simple, black and white diagrammatic maps showed superdistricts where opportunity for growth lay. The maps showed the outward growth of the metropolitan region, characterized by moderate decline in the core of the region (mostly the city of Atlanta) and rapid growth in the outer stretches of suburban counties. These output maps were then used to create more suggestive images that imposed color-coded arrows to show directions of population and employment growth on a map of the region. The final graphics included in the RDP presented a detailed rendering of what the combination of projected growth, transportation infrastructure, and environmental policies would ideally look like at the neighborhood scale.

This pattern fit neatly within the prevailing discourse concerning the future of the region, which was consumed with crime and race and economic decline in the central city. Beneath the surface consistency between numbers and words, the projections could also be used to identify specific political districts where future infrastructure should be directed, which could exert a very real influence on the way that development occurred across the region. The combination of numbers and images offered an ostensibly neutral analysis of growth that could be used during planning discussions.³⁶

The tell-tale images in the RDP show a hypothetical progression of land development patterns, from a standard 19th century urban grid to contemporary conservation-style subdivisions, the organization of the visuals pointing clearly to which

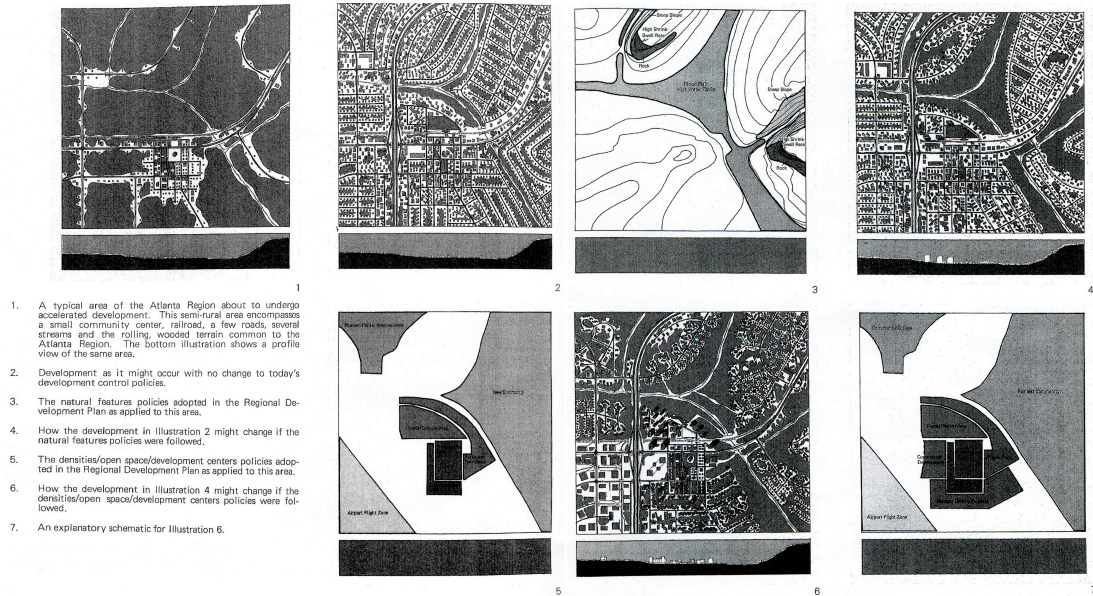


Figure 3.1: Projection of Regional Development Patterns, 1975
 Courtesy of Atlanta Regional Commission

one of these possible development arrangements would result from following the guidelines laid.³⁷ Taken together, the policies in the plan were most clearly aimed at minimizing the impact of a group of environmentally damaging practices mostly related to water quality and providing for reduced congestion in the transportation network. Land use, however much it was an active medium through which transportation and environmental policy unfolded, remained implicit, largely a function of confluence of other forces. In sum, the projections, maps, and policies pointed the way to creating a low-density, urban landscape and visualized the beginnings of a vast horizontal sprawl that would unfold over the next three decades.³⁸

Measuring the Influence of the RDP

In spite of the problems of doing and evaluating regional plans and agencies, as context and process and product, regional planning has strongly influenced the form of urban development within metro Atlanta.³⁹ An important event in the region's development, the 1975 RDP proved to be the beginning of an extended effort that produced a loose but careful schematic expression of regional goals and showed in a general way how those goals could/should be achieved within a set of parameters that were liable to flex over time. Though a data gathering and management requirement, one that also included the calculation of annual population estimates, was included in ARC's legislative dictum, which stated rather vaguely that the agency "shall engage in a continuous program of research," the more specialized and complex task of forecasting population and employment, and devising future conditions based on those numbers, came to occupy a prominent position in the agency's agenda only after the agency was up and running and the RDP process began.⁴⁰

To some extent, the attention to projections and forecasts was presaged by the fact that the agency had been given responsibility for area planning activities required by a variety of federal programs, which themselves often required forecasts to be prepared in order for local programs to be eligible for public financing. Yet the methodology of making forecasts was far from explicit, which gave the agency considerable leeway in deciding what techniques to use and when to use them, decisions that were made using specialized knowledge that was an outgrowth of the professional bureaucracy. Though an important part of the agency's work, the modeling and forecasting business remained somewhat behind the scenes and largely beyond the purview of most observers outside

the process. The little reporting about the projections that did exist presented them as products of an opaque, computerized process.⁴¹ But the projections nevertheless became a key feature of the planning process, and ended up forming a significant activity for ARC, measured by the amount of time and energy put into creating and publicizing them and the response they received from stakeholders after they were published.

As the plan making process neared completion, concern began to center on how development policies were generated and approved and who should be allowed to participate in the process. The conversation gathered around the specific questions of whether the regional development policies that were considered for inclusion in the RDP were only “accommodating growth rather than guiding it,” and if the structure of the planning process itself stifled the role of public involvement. In letters and comments to the ARC, a number of organizations and community groups claimed that the RDP was hiding an “unconstrained growth policy” that would lead to “continued, uncontrolled growth,” and ultimately failure because of the “selection of transportation as the chief modifier of future growth patterns.” Criticizing ARC’s data collection activities for dominating the planning process, the Georgia Conservancy, a pro-business environmental organization, cut to the core, arguing that “alternatives to growth and development should be the result of planning, not the basis for planning.”⁴² A report authored by one of ARC’s own advisory subcommittees suggested that the agency’s board so tightly controlled the regional planning process that dissent from a growth agenda was nearly impossible.⁴³

Far from being background information to inform decision making during the RDP process, the projections had pushed their way to the center of a robust discourse

attended by different groups contending for control over development. As the process unfolded, the conversation turned more pointed. Non-technical participants zeroed in on the role of population and employment scenarios in the process, only later realizing that a particularly close relationship had developed between the outputs of the allocation models and the development policies selected for inclusion in the planning process, indication that the forecasts had turned into the primary motive force influencing the decision making context, and for justifying the transportation, environmental, and land use policies that were described within the document.⁴⁴ Whether in favor or against, everyone involved in the RDP came to understand that the allocation model wielded power that appeared to be distorting the planning process. Hence the question was whether regional planning had simply become a tool for the purpose of creating more growth, leading to development policies that only accommodated anticipated growth and were only incidentally concerned with guiding the shape that growth would take, or was the story actually more complex?

Perhaps not surprisingly, as the outputs of the forecast models circulated around the planning and development community, they captured an increasing share of the regional discourse. At a number of junctures, both during and after the RDP process, different stakeholders and interest groups commented, contested, and challenged them. Because the forecasts became the official regional numbers when the RDP was adopted by the ARC Board, they became the basis for functional transportation, water supply, and housing plans. The rancor created by the forecasts lingered some years after they were adopted. For example, the forecasts were the base for ARC's water quality planning efforts in the late 1970s, which were governed by the EPA under the aegis of Section 208

of the 1972 Clean Water Act. In 1977, the forecasts were contested again, this time by the EPA, which threatened to withdraw the region's 208 grant if the numbers could not be revised downward. A settlement between ARC, EPD, and EPA averted a showdown.⁴⁵

The intensity and persistence of the discussion the projections generated during the process underscored their central role in the eyes of not only planners but also elected officials, developers, and groups representing the public. The discourse drew significant attention to how the forecasts subtly embodied a particular vision of urban growth and development, and animated the critical role of forecasts in a way that would dominate much of the subsequent planning process. By virtue of the significance of the projections and forecasts to policy discussions, the presentation of policies to board meetings and public forums ushered the problems of the forecasts into the broader regional sphere. The path by which ideas made their way from internal discussions and staff research to board meetings and public events raises questions about the way the region was envisioned by those who were charged with charting its future.

Conclusion

How did the RDP and its population projections encourage the growth of the sprawling landscape that has come to symbolize metropolitan Atlanta? This question floated around the organizations and stakeholders involved throughout the process. The full implications of the context in which the plan was written would reveal themselves both during the three years spent writing the 1975 RDP and for a number of years following.⁴⁶ The structure of the process of writing the RDP explains in part how the

projections acquired such wide influence, and at the same time comments on the greater significance of efforts to plan at a regional scale.

The RDP and its forecasts influenced the development of the region largely because of their intertwining relationship with the metropolitan planning agency. In turn, the RDP process formed a critical part of a close relationship between regional actors (bureaucrats and politicians) that the planning agency brought together, giving both credibility and objectivity to the prospect of rapid growth and development. The technical specifications of the forecasting process, determined as they were by a combination of regulations and the standards of professional practice, worked with the demands of a regional political culture to position growth as a positive end. Planning in this sense established projected growth and then created a set of policies that encouraged the realization of that future. The influence of the regional plan could be seen in the simple practice of approving development projects based on need derived from its projections.

The potential problem of overly restrictive development policies had been implicitly addressed in the RDP. After adopting a set of regional environmental and transportation policies, ARC also provided a system for allowing them to be modified as the need arose. General policies were designed to allow interpretative flexibility, so if they appeared to conflict with what the projections, or circumstances on the ground, indicated, there would be room for action, since few policies restricted specific practices.⁴⁷ The projections and forecasts however, remained mostly immune to continuous modification. Because of their stability, the official forecasts were used to justify where and when policies should be modified, or infrastructure constructed. The

effect of this kind of planning framework is neither immediately dramatic nor always apparent, but accumulates over time. As land is developed, the locations of concern change, making the ins and outs of development hard to track, giving rise to the temptation to suggest that spatially disconnected development is the result of random or unplanned or uncoordinated decision-making.

Through the work of staff, committees, meetings, public events, and a series of detailed studies, the policies that made up the RDP were gathered together over the course of the years 1972 to 1975. The paper trail left from this process represents a distillation of an extensive, complex, and fluid effort that combined the work of a professional planning staff, nonprofit organizations, developers, elected officials, and the public. The ideas that emerged from the process were organized around two key substantive categories: environment and transportation. The policies were designed to guide and structure the distribution of development around the region, but without the explicit force of legally binding regulations.⁴⁸ This pattern became more apparent as time went on.

In the early 1980s, ARC began the process of updating the 1975 RDP by procuring and calibrating a new model to produce updated population and employment forecasts. The second model was adapted from one developed by the San Diego Council of Governments. Advances in computing power and data availability provided for a more sophisticated undertaking, but the order of the process remained essentially unchanged. After producing a set of six alternative scenario packages, each based on varying assumptions about the local and national economy and population migration, one package was picked by the Board to become the official forecast for the region for 1990,

2000, and 2010. These numbers were then used as the base for the 1984 RDP, reaching wide distribution among planners, developers, and politicians, and informing the ways policies were selected.⁴⁹

By the mid-1980s, ARC was assuming much greater responsibility for reviewing major development projects in its member jurisdictions to ensure compliance with federal, state, and its own regional policies. In part a result of ARC's relatively successful control of development along the Chattahoochee River (which was bolstered by a lawsuit the agency filed against the Fulton County Commission that firmly established its authority to guide land use along the river), the agency's role in managing large-scale land developments through a review process (termed Developments of Regional Impact Reviews) was expanded considerably in 1984. Under the revised review system, the agency was directed by the state legislature to analyze the costs and benefits to the greater region of major public and private developments anywhere within its seven jurisdictional counties. Municipalities were required to submit proposals for large developments to ARC for review before rezoning decisions could be made or building permits issued. While ARC's comments were not backed by direct veto power (though in extraordinary cases ARC could move to legally stop a development via lawsuit), the revised review process intensified interaction between involved parties (developers, local officials, ARC bureaucratic staff, the public, other affected individuals/organizations), which provided opportunity for modifying development proposals and revising regional plans to fit into existing growth patterns.⁵⁰ Part of the clearinghouse function of the agency, which had steadily increased in significance during the 1970s, the number of reviews logged by the agency increased manifold after 1984.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the quality and breadth of data available for use in preparing projections and regional development plans improved. At the same time, allocation models for calculating and distributing population and employment grew more sophisticated, allowing planners more precise control over outputs and a greater variety of newly available data to be input. The process also became steadily more spatially explicit as the power and availability of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software increased, allowing cross-cutting themes to be displayed with more visual acuity.

The RDP has continued to be one of ARC's major outputs, updated every eight or nine years (five have been produced including the 1975 edition), and by the mid-1990s had come to be a much more far reaching document, closely linked to the demands associated with federal transportation funding. The data demands of new urban models, and the recognition of the connections between transportation and air quality, coupled with the changes in data availability have helped keep projections and forecasts close to the center of the general regional planning process, even though the intellectual direction of planning practice steadily evolved away from its more technocratic orientation of the 1970s. Later RDP's reflected changes in federal and state regulations regarding transportation, the environment, and public involvement, which resulted in longer, more unwieldy, but also more detailed planning documents. The long term implications of regional planning in metropolitan Atlanta continue to be visible in the region's built environment, it's economy, and patterns of everyday life. Through the coordinating effort of the ARC, the prophesy of forecasted population and employment growth effectively came true, as did a vast low-density urban landscape.⁵¹

Though the volume of reports, hearings, and media coverage concerned with the state of regional planning in the U.S. has been substantial, the process of doing regional planning remains complex, rather poorly understood, and without a detailed guide to the twists and turns the process often takes on the ground. All of this means that measuring the effect of regional planning is difficult, not least because the path between the text of a plan and the bricks and mortar on the ground is invariably marred by unforeseen circumstances, at times hiding both the role of different participants and their motivations for acting. What appears to be simply the result of political horse-trading may be as much a consequence of the confluence of parallel regulations and limited financial parameters. All of this is to say much of the work of regional planning happens quietly, behind the scenes in less visible ways, in the small corners of the planning process that typically escape notice.

Despite these contradictions, most of the extant research on the regional planning process has consistently suggested that the plans and planning process are more or less ineffective, crippled by an often-bewildering array of contradictions between goals, policies, and implementation. The relative powerlessness of the agencies responsible for producing regional plans also has been argued, suggesting that most of the policies and prescriptions contained in the plans neither provide compelling incentives for their adoption, nor possess the kind of authority needed to combat attempts to circumvent them. Most efforts to understand regional planning have looked at simple indicators, for example if a policy was adopted or not based on the text of the policy, and as a result have tended to capture only a glimpse of the possible effect of the plan. Yet the plan and the process of creating the plan operate in tandem. Hence the plan as product (the text

and images themselves) is a result of the decisions made during the process, the participants, admissible data and methods of analysis, policies included and excluded, and the socio-economic context. The effect that the plan will have on the future depends largely on the same kinds of decisions (and many of the same actors) as those that went into creating the plan in the first place. Hence, the origins of the plan and the effects it produces are ultimately part of the same cloth.

Taking a sharply analytic view of the regional planning process, beginning by looking carefully at how the ARC went about the primary tasks in this effort, lends insight into the way regional planning in Atlanta functioned. In effect, the idea that a sprawling region is necessarily a product of an absent or fragmented regional planning infrastructure may be misguided.⁵² Instead, the RDP, and the events that followed it, helped engender what could only be called a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁵³

¹ Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) Collection (hereafter referred to as ARCC), MSS 619, Box 44, Folder 9, 1971; ARCC, Board Meeting Minutes, March 26, 1975

² ARCC, *Atlanta Region: Area Development Profile Update*, 1985, p9; ARCC, MSS 619, Box 44, Folder 9, 1971

³ In his *Regime Politics*, Clarence Stone discusses the interweaving of the downtown interests and Atlanta's two daily papers, the Journal and the Constitution, in the regime that governed the City in the two decades after World War II (Chapter 3).

⁴ *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, "The Flight to Suburbia," January 18, 1970; "Atlanta Like Seven-Legged Octopus," January 18, 1970

⁵ ARCC, "Strategy for the Seventies," 1970

⁶ ARCC, *Regional Development Plan*, 1975

⁷ The major environmental policies included restricting development in flood plains, in areas where the water table was high, in areas with hard sub-surface rock, on steep slopes, and soils where the shrink-swell rate was high. The major transportation policies advocated for road improvements, downtown accessibility, rapid rail and bus infrastructure, bicycle facilities, and transportation for the elderly. See ARCC, *Regional Development Plan of Metropolitan Atlanta*, 1976, p11-13.

⁸ Projections are usually defined as mere extrapolations of past trends, whether linear or exponential. They do not take into account external factors, like migration rates, or attempt to account for contextual nuance. Projections are considered simplistic and formulaic. Forecasts, on the other hand, do account for contextual nuance, moving from the basic information provided

in a projection to a more sustained consideration of likely future scenarios. Forecasts often utilize data from different sources to enhance accuracy and plausibility. Because of this, they are considered more sophisticated. But small area projections and forecasts, the kind used in a regional planning process, both possess well-documented problems with accuracy. The smaller the geographic area, the more difficult it is to use published rates of change derived from national data to measure in migration and out migration, births and deaths. Accordingly, most research has tended to study projections and forecasting for accuracy and performance. But whether defined as projections or forecasts, their role in the planning process tends to be similar. In fact, in practice, the terms often have been interchanged. While the inaccuracy of small area forecasts and projections need not be problematic for planning, because they have come to occupy a significant place in the process of producing plans their accuracy (real or perceived) has become important. Forecasts are subject to political manipulation, particularly by powerful actors interested in using the projections for their own gain. Yet research on this problem has been limited to overviews and theoretical generalizations; detailed case studies of the ways projections operate are virtually non-existent. And investigations of how projections and forecasts are positioned in a concrete case of a planning process are lacking. See Dowell Myers and Alicia Kitsuse, "Constructing the Future in Planning", *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 19, no. 3 (2000).

⁹ The accuracy of projections used in planning has been studied independently, and more recently in conjunction with the politics of major infrastructure projects. For examples of this scholarship, see Alan Altshuler and David Luberoff, *Mega-Projects: the Changing Politics of Urban Public Investment* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Bent Flyvberg, Nils Bruzelis, and Werner Rothengatter, *Megaprojects and Risk: an Anatomy of Ambition*; Andrew Isserman "The Accuracy of Population Projections for Subcounty Areas," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 43, no. 3 (1977); "Projection, Forecast, and Plan: On the Future of Population Forecasting," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 50, no. 2 (1984); "The Right People, The Right Rates," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 59, no. 1 (1993); Steve Murdock, Rita Hamm, Paul Voss, Darrell Fanin, and Beverly Pecotte, "Evaluating Small Area Population Projections," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 57, no.4 (1991); Jeff Tayman, "The Accuracy of Small Area Population Forecasts Based on a Spatial-Interaction Land Use Modeling System," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 62, no. 1 (1996).

¹⁰ The history of large-scale urban models begins with the entry of computers into planning practice in the 1950s, when models were used to allocate population, transportation, and land use within sub-metropolitan areas. The most famous of these was the Chicago Area Transportation Study that began in 1955, which set a standard for metropolitan-level allocation models. See Alan Black, "The Chicago Area Transportation Study: A Case Study of Regional Planning," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 10, no. 1 (1990). For a general overview of these early models, see Alan Voorhees, "Land Use and Traffic Models: A Progress Report," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 25 (1959); Britton Harris, "Urban Development Models: New Tools for Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 31, no. 2 (1965); and Douglas Lee, "Requiem for Large-Scale Models," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 39 (1973). A more recent appraisal of urban models can be found in a special issue of the *Journal of the American Planning Association*. Among the articles in the issue are Michael Batty, "A Chronicle of Scientific Planning: The Anglo-American Modeling Experience," *Journal of the American Planning Association* (1994); Britton Harris, "The Real Issues Concerning Lee's Requiem," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 60, no. 1 (1994); Richard Klosterman, "Large-Scale Urban Models: Twenty Years Later," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 60, no. 1 (1994); Richard Klosterman, "An Introduction to the Literature on Large-Scale Urban Models," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 60, no. 1 (1994).

¹¹ Michael Batty, "A Chronicle of Scientific Planning: The Anglo-American Experience," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 60, no. 1 (1994)

¹² For a discussion of the persistence of the rational model and its expression in popular urban models, see Michael Batty, "A Chronicle of Scientific Planning." In terms of the education of planners, standard planning textbooks of the period included, Mary Maclean, *Local Planning Administration* (Chicago: International City Managers Association, 1959); F. Stuart Chapin, *Urban Land Use Planning* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1965); Kevin Lynch, *Site Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960). The most rigorous critique of the rational planning process enunciated in these books is Altshuler's *The City Planning Process*. Of course, much more famous is Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1969) and Paul Davidoff's "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 31, no. 4 (1965), though both lack the rigor and depth of Altshuler.

¹³ *Atlanta Constitution*, "A View From Atlanta-in-Dekalb," January 18, 1970; *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*, "And Now an Umbrella," February 1, 1970; *Atlanta Journal*, "Regional Council: 3 Views," January 2, 1971; *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*, "Atlanta 'Umbrella' to Spread?" February 7, 1971

¹⁴ *Atlanta Constitution*, "Cobb Residents Tear Into ARC at Hearing," February 8, 1973

¹⁵ *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "A Look at Downtown," October 7, 1974

¹⁶ *Atlanta Constitution*, "CAP Warms of Crime Fears," September 21, 1974

¹⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, "Is Atlanta a 'Classical' Model of City Growth?" September 2, 1973

¹⁸ *Atlanta Constitution*, "Atlanta Boom – No End in Sight," May 19, 1974

¹⁹ See White and Crimmins, "How Atlanta Grew: Cook Heads, Hot Air, and Hard Work."

²⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, "C of C Establishes 8 Suburban Satellite Organizations," November 27, 1975; Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: the Saga of Two Families and the Making of Atlanta*.

²¹ *Atlanta Constitution*, "Rural Forces Still Rule Georgia," June 14, 1973

²² *Atlanta Constitution*, "Clean Water: Lot Left to Do," November 10, 1975

²³ *Atlanta Constitution*, "Carter Names Group to Plan State Growth," September 2, 1973

²⁴ Though used in other places, EMPIRIC played a more extensively role in Atlanta than anywhere else. Official Code of Georgia, 50-32-11, 1971; ARC, *Study Design for Development and Application of EMPIRIC Activity Allocation Model*, 1972; ARC, *The Atlanta Region: Framework for the Future*, 1975

²⁵ See the selection of articles in a published symposium on large-scale models published in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* 60, no. 1 (1994).

²⁶ ARCC, Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission, *Atlanta Silhouettes*, 1962; ARCC, Metropolitan Planning Commission, *Up... Ahead*, 1952; ARCC, Metropolitan Planning Commission, *Now... Forever*, 1954

²⁷ For a limited description of the grandfather of large-scale urban models, see Black, "The Chicago Area Transportation Study," 1990.

²⁸ ARCC, *Study Design for Development and Application of EMPIRIC Activity Allocation Model*, 1972; ARC, *Development and Application of the EMPIRIC Activity Allocation Model for the Atlanta Region*, 1975

²⁹ The decision to bundle development policies set limitations on the number of possible outcomes of the modeling process, even before the process got started. Decisions about which policies to include in each bundle were the result of collaboration by staff and the board.

³⁰ ARCC, *Study Design for Development and Application of EMPIRIC Activity Allocation Model*, 1972

³¹ ARCC, *Development and Application of the EMPIRIC Activity Allocation Model for the Atlanta Region*, 1975, pII-6, pIV-22; ARC, *Regional Development Plan Small Area Forecast*, 1975

³² John Logan and Harvey Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: the Political Economy of Place*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) p50

³³ need citation from a planning textbook of the period

³⁴ ARCC, *Development and Application of the EMPIRIC Activity Allocation Model for the Atlanta Region*, 1975; ARC, *RDP*, 1976, p8, 26

³⁵ ARCC, *Trends in Land Use Planning Law for the Atlanta Region*, June 1976

³⁶ ARCC, *The Atlanta Region: Framework for the Future*, 1975

³⁷ ARCC, *Regional Development Plan*, 1975, p47.

³⁸ ARCC, *Staff Recommendations Report: RDP*, June 1975, p3-9; ARCC, *RDP*, 1976, p36; ARCC, *Regional Housing Plan*, Dec, 1975; ARCC, *RDP*, 1975, p20. For an extended discussion of the history of the post-World War II environmental movement, see Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*.

³⁹ The effect of regional planning in metropolitan development has received precious little attention. Examples of recent work that attempts to address regional planning activities and institutions includes Ray Bromley, "Metropolitan Regional Planning: Enigmatic History, Global Future," *Planning Practice and Research* 16, no. 3/4 (2001); Cliff Ellis, "Interstate Highways, Regional Planning and the Reshaping of Metropolitan America"; Leora Waldner, "Regional Plans, Local Fates: The Influence of 1976 and 1985 Regional Development Plans on Local Government Policy," PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley (2003).

⁴⁰ Georgia Laws, "Metropolitan Area Planning and Development Commissions Created," General Acts and Resolutions, 1971

⁴¹ The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution, "ARC Forecasters Pose Questions," October 28, 1973

⁴² ARCC, Commission Board Meeting Minutes, Dec 13, 1972

⁴³ ARCC, Letter to ARC from Atlanta Chapter American Institute of Architects, Sept 8, 1975; ARCC, Georgia Conservancy Statement Regarding the Proposed ARC Regional Development Plan, September 3, 1975; ARCC, Letter from Virginia Taylor to Harry West, July 25, 1974; ARCC, Letter from Virginia Taylor to L.D. Lacy, May 31, 1974; ARCC, Board Meeting Minutes, Jan 13, 1975; ARCC, Board Meeting Minutes, Jan 13, 1975

⁴⁴ For an interesting contribution to the discussion of the role of population projections in planning and public policy see Martin Wachs, "Ethical Dilemmas in Forecasting for Public Policy," *Public Management Forum* (November/December, 1982); see also Andrejs Skaburskis and Michael Teitz, "Forecasts and Outcomes," *Planning Theory and Practice* 4, no. 4 (2003).

⁴⁵ *Caution Collection*, Box 51, Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library, "Memorandum to Members of the Atlanta Regional Commission Executive Committee, October 19, 1977"

⁴⁶ ARCC, "Memorandum from Bart Lewis to Connie Blackmon," September, 1984

⁴⁷ A good example is the case of water and sewer system infrastructure. A pattern of altering plans for constructing mains and treatment plants had emerged by the time the RDP process was concluding. Increases in federal funds available for constructing infrastructure, a result of the 1972 Clean Water Act, were distributed based on projected demand, which was in turn based on population and employment projections. Hence plans written in the early 1970s to guide the expansion of water transmission lines and build new wastewater treatment capacity in Gwinnett County through the year 1988, one of the jurisdictions in the ARC region, were revised as the RDP projections were developed and adopted. This allowed the county to take advantage of available money, but at the same time lay the infrastructure that would support and encourage

development in outlying areas. This happened repeatedly in the region. In each instance, existing policies were changed or replaced based on projections (or revisions to projections).

⁴⁸ ARCC, *The Atlanta Region: Framework for the Future*, 1975; Official Code of Georgia, 50-32-11, 1971

⁴⁹ ARCC, *Final Technical Report: Atlanta Region Forecasts*, 1983

⁵⁰ ARCC, *RDP*, 1976, p14; ARCC, *Atlanta Region: Area Development Profile Update*, 1985, p9; ARCC, Working Memo #2, *The Regional Impact of Zoning*, Dec 1973; ARCC, Memorandum from Dan Sweat to members of the Atlanta Regional Commission Board, September 1972

⁵¹ Atlanta Regional Commission, *Regional Snapshot: the Changing Atlanta Region*, Atlanta (2003); Atlanta Regional Commission, *Regional Snapshot: Density vs. Sprawl*, Atlanta (2004); The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, *Moving Beyond Sprawl: the Challenge for Metropolitan Atlanta* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); Anthony Downs, "Urban Realities: Some Controversial Aspects of the Atlanta Region's Future," *The Brookings Review* 12, no. 3 (1994)

⁵² Writing about the growth of Atlanta has followed relatively consistent themes of boosterism and race, but the role of regional planning has not been well explored. For examples of Atlanta's history, see Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*; "Roads to Racial Segregation: Atlanta in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Urban History* 15, no. 1 (1988); Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*; Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*; Ruthheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*; White and Crimmins, "How Atlanta Grew: Cool Heads, Hot Air, and Hard Work."

⁵³ The phrase "self-fulfilling prophesy" was captured by Robert Merton in an article, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophesy," he published in the *Antioch Review* in 1948.

Chapter 4

The River and the Region

Introduction

The Chattahoochee is the biggest of the three major rivers that cut across the Apalachicola Basin, a long, narrow watershed that drains just over 19,000 square miles of Georgia, Alabama, and a sliver of western Florida. Seventeen different tributaries feed the river, most intersecting along its northern half. Flowing southwesterly from its origin in the Blue Ridge Mountains in north central Georgia to the Florida state line, the river winds for most of its 436 miles through rural lands, forming a significant section of the boundary between Georgia and Alabama. The second river in the system is the Flint, a substantial water body in its own right that originates near Hartsfield International Airport on the south side of the city of Atlanta. Coming together where Alabama, Florida, and Georgia meet, the two rivers form the Apalachicola, a wide but short river that empties into the Apalachicola Bay in northern Florida, a briny, shallow inlet home to one of the nation's largest and most productive oyster beds.¹

Though the Chattahoochee itself is rarely more than 300 feet wide, its primary watershed spans 8,600 square miles, of which a small but significant portion includes the largest counties in metropolitan Atlanta.² Despite its physical limitations, the

Chattahoochee has given water Atlanta area households since the city's first intakes were laid into the stream in 1891. The city's original pumping station, named for Mayor Hemphill, was opened in 1892 on a site three miles north of the CBD, and the R.M. Clayton treatment plant was opened in 1934 on the eastern bank of the river along the city's western boundary. Together, the facilities provided fresh water to and carried sewerage away from most of the city's neighborhoods, several neighboring cities, and parts of unincorporated Fulton County. During the first half of the 20th century, the city's water authority grew into the largest regional broker of water, selling supplies to neighboring cities and counties. Excess waste treatment capacity allowed the city to provide sewer services to many of the same places.

A comprehensive survey of the Chattahoochee River (and neighboring lands) sponsored by the federal government in the late 1920s reflected the optimism of an age when a waterfront was considered a necessary feature of any city that expected to grow into national prominence. By lobbying for a comprehensive survey of the river basin, boosters in both Atlanta and Columbus (the other significant Georgia city through which the river flowed) hoped to build a case for dredging a 9-foot deep channel from the Gulf of Mexico to an imagined inland barge port on the west side of Atlanta. Though the survey refuted the wisdom of creating a navigable channel all the way to Atlanta, it did support the idea of building a series of dams to regulate the flow of the river and curtail its tendency to flood. With the passage of the federal Rivers and Harbors Act in 1935, authorization was granted for spending federal money on a project to harness the Chattahoochee-Flint-Apalachicola river system. The project proposed four new hydroelectric dams, three along the lower stretches of the river, which were the most

flood prone, and one near the river's head, in the foothills of the southern Appalachians. Buford Dam, the northern facility, would regulate the entire three-river system, generate power for metropolitan Atlanta while containing and releasing enough water to maintain a 9-foot navigable channel in the section of the Chattahoochee and Apalachicola between Columbus and the Gulf.³

In the aftermath of World War II, when the steel gates of the intake structure on Buford Dam were first closed in early 1956, and the waters of the Chattahoochee River began to back up into the wide but relatively shallow 38,000 acre Lake Sidney Lanier (named for the Georgia-born 19th century poet). Not inadvertently, the dam responsible for regulating the flow of the river system for flood control also helped ensure a dependable water supply source for the region. Devised as part of a larger effort by the Army Corps of Engineers to create more navigable waters, generate power, and control flooding on the Chattahoochee-Flint-Apalachicola River system, the new dam enabled Atlanta's burgeoning suburban counties to begin taking large quantities of the Chattahoochee's water. Bolstered by the dam's regulation of the river's seasonal flow fluctuations, suburban governments were able to build capacity to both withdraw enough drinking water to support their expectations of future growth and discharge the wastewater that future growth would inevitably produce.

With the growth of these suburbs, the lake that resulted from the dam's construction, which spread across Hall, Dawson, and Forsyth counties about 50 miles northeast of downtown Atlanta, would steadily evolve from its early function of generating electricity for the local utility and controlling floods into a popular recreational water body, then into a vital source of drinking water, and finally an amenity

for the thousands of single-family houses that have mushroomed along its shores. This progression of events engendered significant pressure on the river's water, both in terms of demand for withdrawals and polluted discharges. Increasing demand for water withdrawals produces increased discharge in the form of point-source sewerage discharges. The complicated relationship between supply and pollution in the Chattahoochee-Lanier water complex would have a significant impact on the management of the region's water resources that would bind the fate of the lake to the fate of the river.

Belying its comparatively small size and pollution problems, the Chattahoochee has consistently provided upwards of 75% of the region's drinking water over the last five decades. Atlanta's political leaders have long recognized the precarious character of the river, its size, environmental fragility, and capacity to serve as a long-term water supply, as an obstacle to future development, even while failing to legislate regulations that would protect it. Warnings issued over the years regarding the ability of the river to continue to provide the lion's share of the region's fresh water supply have been consistently dire and yet consistently wrong. The evolving role of the regional planning agencies, particularly ARC, reveals how the apparent inconsistency between a limited water supply, meager watershed protection, and rapid growth has been managed.⁴ In effect, the public bureaucracy stepped into a void left by political leadership.

With the adoption of the Chattahoochee River Management Plan in 1973, ARC opened a significant theater in its effort to guide the development of the region. Designed to control development along a 48-mile stretch of the river just below Buford Dam, the river corridor plan proved to be a tool ARC could use to establish its authority over the

region's main water source. Because the river held such a vital role in the region's water supply (and wastewater disposal), Atlanta's leaders had long recognized the likelihood that local governments were not by themselves in a position to manage the resource effectively. Though initially resisted, after the agency sued the Fulton County Commission over its decision to rezone a parcel adjacent to the river without first submitting the application to ARC for comment, the legitimacy of the plan and the agency's authority to intervene in decisions about development along the river were firmly established.⁵

The Regional Water Systems

The construction of Buford Dam was the culmination of a long-term planning effort, supported and encouraged by the federal government, to develop the Apalachicola Basin, an effort with rather significant implications for water supply and urban development. The legacy of this planning effort, which stretches back more than 50 years, holds significant implications for Atlanta's water supply situation. By the mid-1950s, there were two regional water systems with intakes on the River, one built by the city of Atlanta in the late 19th century, the other by Dekalb County in the 1920s. These two systems, both also in the business of brokering wholesale water to other municipalities, were the first of what would become four major regional water authorities. In the mid-1960s, the Dekalb and Atlanta systems were joined by authorities in Cobb and Gwinnett (both coming on line before the state instituted a surface water withdrawal permitting system), which developed new water intakes and wastewater

treatment plants to supply water and sewerage to residents and businesses within their boundaries but also to sell to adjacent municipalities.

All four withdrew and discharged in the Chattahoochee. But because the location of intakes and wastewater plants was limited by geologic and topographic conditions, not to mention financial considerations, the total number of facilities was limited. Major intakes needed to be located above major discharge points, in places where flow was adequate, and within (or very near) the political boundaries of the withdrawing agency. There were only a few spots along the upper Chattahoochee that fit these criteria.⁶ As a result of the limit on the number of facilities the watershed could support, agreements were struck between larger governments with facilities and smaller governments without facilities to provide supply and treatment. Over time, existing plants were renovated to add excess capacity to provide room for anticipated future growth from selling water. The number of agreements between local governments expanded steadily during the 1960s and into the early 1970s as the region's population grew. The ongoing influx of people and industries lead to rising water consumption, which curtailed the ability of smaller municipal water providers to continue to cobble together their own water sources from deep wells and the myriad small creeks that carve up the region. The prevailing land use patterns were becoming increasingly urban. Only the largest water authorities possessed the resources to build and maintain the extensive systems that could meet the demands of new residents and businesses.

The resulting web of inter-jurisdictional contracts to buy and sell supplies and treatment capacity across political boundaries and between adjacent governments produced a dense web of water and sewer mains divided among a handful of large water

and sewer authorities. By the early 1970s, contracts between authorities were beginning to send water outside the seven-county Atlanta region, which often resulted transfers of the Chattahoochee's water into other watersheds and a magnification of undesirable environmental side effects. For instance, the Dekalb County Water Authority sold water wholesale to Rockdale County (which had no intake system of its own). The Atlanta Water Resources Commission sold water to the Fayette County Water System (which had limited intake capacity). Both Fayette and Rockdale returned wastewater to rivers and streams outside the Chattahoochee watershed.⁷ As the number of water authorities and the number of water provision agreements grew, so did the amount of water withdrawn from the river. The number of public agencies engaged in taking water out and putting treated water back in hobbled the long-term and cumulative ability of the watershed to support the region's thirst, and seriously degraded the quality of the water flowing to downstream cities and counties. The ultimate effect of the development of the river as a water source for metropolitan Atlanta could be seen in the declining production of the famed Apalachicola oyster 400 miles south.⁸

A Legacy of Surface Water Management

The number and breadth of regulations designed to simultaneously exploit and protect urban water resources expanded considerably during the 20th century, resembling a loose movement largely orchestrated by the federal government. While federal interest in water resource planning dates back to the founding of the Republic, this interest shifted and intensified in the years immediately following World War II, and has been reflected in a series of major Congressional reports and legislative initiatives targeted to water

policy. Since 1946 there have been five major federal commissions designed to examine water resource planning and management, efforts that have proven both repetitive and useful. Coming in waves, the reports and plans produced by the commissions emphasized different aspects of federal water policy, though they shared an overriding concern with the need to establish a central water policy for the nation.⁹ As a cumulative effort, the reports often did stimulate legislative action, leading to a number of new policy directions that proved important to cleaning the nation's waterways, and together could be described as a national policy. Yet they did not equal the kind of efficient comprehensive policy that had propelled them into existence.

Through the 1950s and early 1960s, federal water officials struggled with how to manage the growing number of bureaucracies involved in water resource decision making. Attention to intergovernmental coordination around the issue of water became more pronounced, especially the topography of the interface between local, state, and federal governments.¹⁰ At the federal level, reforming the complicated relationship between the Department of Agriculture, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of the Interior held particular interest, since each agency held sway over different aspects of water policy, particularly flood control and infrastructure development, their responsibilities often overlapping and at times in conflict. Forming the first wave of federal commissions in the early post-War years, the Hoover Commission (originally 1949, reconstituted in 1955), Cooke Commission (1950), and Kerr Commission (1961) represented ambitious attempts to comprehensively evaluate the situation of federal water policy, offer suggestions for reforming the mechanisms through which policies were developed and implemented, and clear up lingering jurisdictional

conflicts. Sifting through the litany of suggestions the commission reports offered, the net effect of this work was to encourage a shift of water resource planning “away from regional development to the apportionment of an increasingly scarce resource.”¹¹ Settling inter-agency conflicts proved harder to accomplish. Nevertheless, the idea of managing water according to scarcity would ripple through the next thirty years of federal water policy.

As pressure from the burgeoning environmental movement mounted in the late 1960s, concerns over the allocation of surface waters in western states, particularly those with rapidly growing urban populations, sparked yet another broad assessment of water resources. This would lead to the second wave of congressional water resource commissions and attendant data gathering efforts. In 1968, the year before President Nixon would sign NEPA into law, Congress created the National Water Commission. The Commission was directed to make another attempt at cataloging and analyzing the increasingly onerous and complex water problems facing the nation, revisiting many of the same issues that the earlier commissions had confronted. The final draft of the Commission’s report, published in 1973, contained a long list of specific recommendations for changing and restructuring federal water policy. Though the content of individual recommendations varied, a few overarching themes tied all the recommendations together. Seven were identified: refocusing water policy to be more engaged in determining future demand, rather than the other way around; prioritizing water quality enhancement over development of resources; recognizing the critical role of land use in water planning; writing new water conservation policies; improving cost-benefit calculations used in water project accounting; updating old water laws; and

devolving much of the responsibility for water protection from the federal government to state governments and regional agencies. These were the most important findings in the report both in terms of influencing future federal and state legislation, as well as framing the character of intergovernmental relationships concerned with water.¹²

When the Federal Water Pollution Control Act was passed in 1972, it opened a tremendous new flow of federal money directed to deal with the ecology of rivers and streams that had been degraded by pollution. The Clean Water Act (as it came to be known) largely relied on technology and infrastructure to remedy surface water pollution, and established a formula that guaranteed local governments 75% of the cost to build or upgrade municipal wastewater treatment facilities toward this end. Managed by the newly created Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Clean Water Act was expected to produce dramatic improvements in the quality of the nation's rivers and streams by 1985 (which it ultimately did). With an initial allocation of \$18 billion dollars to be disbursed over the course of 10 years, the CWA supported a massive building (and re-building) of the nation's sewer treatment capacity. The planning requirements specified in the text of the Clean Water Act would play prominently in the efforts of the State of Georgia and the Atlanta Regional Commission to establish water resource planning as an issue worthy of a regional approach.

The need to work out the details of implementing the Clean Water Act led to the creation of the second commission of the second wave related to water supply quality, the National Commission on Water Quality (which came right on the heels of the final National Water Commission report). Set up to clarify and correct the ambitious water quality goals set up by the CWA, the Commission issued its final report in 1976, which,

among other things, suggested that the 1977 and 1983 deadlines for cleaning up surface waters was achievable, though case-by-case extensions would likely be necessary. However, following recommendations in the 1973 report of the National Water Commission, the new report suggested that the goal for zero-discharges by 1985 should be softened, arguing that despite its emotional appeal, the cost of eliminating 100% of discharge would be unattainably high. The 1976 report also underlined previous criticism of the enforcement of the National Environmental Protection Act and the role of the EPA in the enforcement process.¹³

During Jimmy Carter's presidency in the late 1970s, his administration established an independent water task force (assuming many of the tasks of a formal Congressional commission) charged with making recommendations on how to improve the relationship between federal water policy and the individual states' roles in implementing that policy. Carter's task force made a number of recommendations that resonated with previous federal commissions, among the most important being the suggestion of a greater role for states in the process of making decisions about major water projects and a new effort to promote project cost sharing across levels of government, though little action followed. In 1981, as the Reagan administration settled into the executive branch, an echo of the Carter task force's recommendations found a receptive audience, except that this time the necessary political capital existed to put them into practice. The new administration aimed to mandate that state and local governments co-sponsor all water projects (including financial contributions) and also assume an overall greater share of total project costs. The passage of the 1986 Water Resources Development Act, a major legislative effort backed by the administration that allocated

\$16 billion for water projects and planning, implemented these policy changes. To try to ensure that the act would actually pass water infrastructure costs down to state and local governments, Reagan also vetoed a renewal of the Clean Water Act, which would have kept the federal government on the hook for providing a large share of the money. Congress subsequently overrode his veto, tempering the effect of the Water Resources Development Act.¹⁴

The evolution of federal water policy over the last five decades reflects significant changes in the conceptualization of how the nation's water resources should be managed. Backing away from a more exploitive stance, whereby resource development was the overriding concern, the early 1970s represent a transition to a more ecologically centered view, one that also reflected the role of environmental issues as a key part of the planning bureaucracy and the importance of planning within federal policy. Partly at the behest of the federal government and partly by their own accord, states also began instituting new regulations to respond to the concern about water quality, creating a parallel layer of regulation in the form of state departments of natural resources and water quality boards. This context created new demands for comprehensive planning, drawing attention to the connections between decisions about water resources, land use, and transportation. Beginning in the 1950s, water resource planning represented a burgeoning front in the federal involvement in shaping the urban landscape. By the late 1960s considerable financial resources, many of which were directed at infrastructure building, were beginning to be brought to bear on the new water policies. In the years after 1970, as the level of funding increased, money was often filtered through regional planning agencies. The way these policies were implemented and money was spent by state, regional, and

local agencies, provides insight into how formerly divergent environmental issues (water and air) were linked together through transportation policy within the increasingly complex activities of regional planning agencies.¹⁵ In this milieu we can frame ARC's effort to manage the Chattahoochee River and how it assumed the task of coordinating water resource planning for the region.

Setting an Agenda

As it flows into the metropolitan Atlanta region, tracing the critical nexus of political borders that separate Gwinnett, Fulton, and Cobb counties, the Chattahoochee presents itself simultaneously as both boundary line and residential amenity. Separating the city of Atlanta from its western suburbs, along its rolling bluffs sit many of the metropolitan area's priciest neighborhoods. Dominated by large-lot, single-family houses, which have slowly transformed the natural viewsheds of the water into private space, the river's landscape displays little of the intense industrial and commercial development often associated with urban waterways. Nevertheless, the houses and office parks that sprouted along the riverbanks have over the years generated rather considerable concern.

This concern had intensified and begun to capture significant local attention by the early-1970s. As a result of the mountainous, Appalachian character of the northern third of Georgia and the absence of modern infrastructure, between the end of the world war and the late-1960s most of the land along the river north of metro Atlanta faced little development pressure and had remained undeveloped, even rural. As a result, the Chattahoochee's water still ran clear when it reached the metro area, supporting a variety

of fish and game (including the southernmost trout hatchery in North America) and providing a high quality municipal water source. But control over land development, like in the rest of the state, had been left up to the individual cities and counties that fronted the river. The state showed little concern over water quality or controlling the development that did happen. So when the fate of the river's water emerged as a significant regional issue, attracting the attention of federal regulatory agencies, a minor battle ensued over how local, state, and federal agencies would embrace a common framework to decide the river's fate. How to handle development, which political jurisdictions would be in charge of planning its future, and what kinds of management and enforcement tools should be available were questions that framed the debate about the river's future.

The roots of the debate in the early 1970s stem in part from the work of the U.S. Study Commission – Southeastern River Basins and the series of regional pollution enforcement conferences the study sponsored. Inspired by the unrealized promise of a regional water basin bill first introduced by Robert Kerr in the 81st Congress, Richard Russell, the powerful Democratic Senator from Georgia, introduced a modified version of Kerr's legislation in the 85th Congress in 1958. Signed into law by President Eisenhower later that year, the bill created the United States Study Commission - Southeast River Basins, an experiment in planning for region-wide water resource development. Focusing attention on the major rivers in the southeast, including the Chattahoochee and Altamaha, the two basins that drain virtually all of metropolitan Atlanta, the commission produced a comprehensive survey and plan for conservation, land development, and water quality in five major Southeastern river basins. The

resulting three-volume document represented a new kind of water planning effort on the part of the federal government. The only contemporary evaluation of the work of the Commission emphasized the value of its administrative structure, which allowed it to straddle the divide between different federal agencies and the states, which often have apparently competing interests. The complexion of the commission itself, comprised of representatives from six federal agencies and five individuals from the affected states, plus a chairman, as well as the generous time provided it to complete its activities, allowed a degree of independence from existing federal and state bureaucracies, while maintaining connections to both sides. The power of the bureaucratic staff vis-à-vis the politically appointed commissioners was reflected in the ideas that found their way into the plan, which overwhelmingly relied on empirical data and technical analysis. Quantifying policies, establishing variables that could be measured with the tools at hand, allowed the staff to provide apparently neutral, authoritative information to the commissioners at critical moments during their policy decisions.¹⁶

The combination of a political commission with a limited life-span, comprised of both state and federal representatives appointed by the President, and a large, experienced bureaucratic staff drawn from a number of different federal agencies, perhaps avoided some of the political difficulties associated with a permanent water planning organization. In spite of its temporality, the Study Commission, through the breadth and depth of its plans, proved to be a touchstone for later efforts to conduct water basin planning, particularly efforts directed toward the Chattahoochee.¹⁷ Rapidly changing and increasingly complex land use patterns presented new demands on the management of water resources. Understanding these interactions required more sophisticated analytic

techniques, which in turn required more reliable data. By highlighting the relative paucity of good data documenting land and water conditions in Southeast river basins, the Study Commission brought needed attention to the challenge of writing comprehensive water resource plans that accurately captured conditions on the ground, without adequate data.¹⁸

The loose structure of the commission influenced the depth and scope of the resulting plan. Beyond its ability to draw attention to the problems of planning for water in a multi-jurisdictional setting, the plan introduced a number of ideas that ended up in regional water plans ARC would later produce. By concluding that floods presented little danger, no significant navigation demands currently existed, and hydroelectric plants would never provide enough power to be a significant source for the region, the Study Commission's Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) plan set the stage for more attention to be paid to pollution, erosion, and recreation. Accordingly, the ACF plan recorded and projected the magnitude of Atlanta's burgeoning pollution (and population) problem and its potential impact on water supply and recreation. Along with inadequately treated sewage being dumped into the river, the plan also warned of the potentially dangerous (and growing) practice of collecting municipal supply water from one river basin and discharging that water as waste into a different basin.¹⁹ The plan proposed a new re-regulation dam 10 to 20 miles below Buford dam, to provide better control over the river's flow, important for the ability of the river to provide long-term water supply. Recognizing that in spite of spatial separation, different "activities in all parts of the basins are rather closely related to the existence, development, and use of the Chattahoochee, Flint, and Apalachicola rivers," a fact that had been overlooked in the

past, the plan relayed the need for greater areawide, cross-jurisdictional cooperation. But perhaps most portentously, the plan identified a looming conflict between neighboring governments (states, counties, and cities) over the fair use of the surface water in the ACF basin under existing rules of riparian doctrine, and proposed changes in state water laws to take into account the complexities of allocating water among a wide variety of constituencies.²⁰

As the Study Commission demonstrates, discussions over how to plan for and manage the Chattahoochee River long predate the involvement of ARC's efforts to guide development along the stretch of river that passes through metropolitan Atlanta. As well as providing critical water supply to Atlanta, the Chattahoochee River has been an important resource for a range of interests all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. Since before the turn of the 20th century, small municipalities in both Georgia and Alabama withdrew water for their own municipal delivery systems. Farmers depended on the river for crop irrigation and power plants and mills depended on the river's water for their production processes. Fishermen in and around Apalachicola Bay (at the river's mouth) depended on the briny conditions in the river delta for their shellfish harvests. Each group presented a claim on the river.

And for many years, the river supported these demands in equilibrium. The residents and businesses in Atlanta, sitting near the riverhead, did not withdraw enough water to significantly impede the flow, and they did not return enough polluted wastewater to seriously degrade the water available to downstream neighbors. But as demands on the river from the growth of North Georgia increased, the quality and amount of water available downstream was seriously eroded. With the 1948 Water

Pollution Control Act, the federal government got involved in interstate water quality issues, which had particular salience for rivers and streams, like the Chattahoochee, that crossed, or formed, state boundaries. The dispute that arose between Georgia and Alabama, and eventually dragged Florida into the conflict, was provoked by the rising incidence of pollution of the Chattahoochee, a problem that was blamed on waste discharges from Atlanta and its growing suburbs. This dispute would persist for forty years, and because of the size and importance of the river's watershed, would color the role ARC assumed and force the long-term involvement of the federal government in planning the region's water supply.

Just as the ACF advisory commission predicted, by the mid-1960s pollution in the Chattahoochee had become severe enough to attract the attention of the state of Georgia. In response, the state legislature created a water quality control board, part of the Water Quality Control Act of 1964, to address general issues of water pollution in the state's surface waters. The Act specified that municipal and industrial sewage treatment facilities must provide secondary treatment before discharge into the state's surface waters by 1975. Moving toward this goal, the Georgia Water Quality Control Board initiated a formal program in 1965 for abating the pollution that was flowing into the Chattahoochee. Recognizing that the Chattahoochee "is grossly polluted for about 100 miles below Atlanta," the water quality board resolved to substantially clean up the discharge coming from Atlanta and its suburbs.²¹ Using data gathered from federal surveys of the 100-mile stretch of river downstream from Atlanta, but entirely within the State's boundaries, the program required plans for how abatement would be achieved from all municipalities and industries discharging untreated waste into the river.²² Several

of Atlanta's existing treatment plants (constructed in the 1930s and 1950s) were overloaded, and part of the city's sewer and storm water system was combined, meaning that during major rain events raw sewage mixed with rainwater and flowed freely into the river. Because of the age and scope of the system, any abatement plan would be extraordinarily expensive. And with projections for significant population and economic growth in metropolitan Atlanta for the next three decades, the pollution problem appeared to be on the verge of getting out of hand. In addition to Atlanta's discharge, a number of smaller Georgia cities, also with aged or poorly managed treatment facilities, used the river or its tributaries for waste disposal (often untreated), further contributing to the overall degradation of the river before it reached Alabama. Hence Alabama (and Florida) users withdrawing water for municipal and agriculture supply were left with a seriously impaired water body, with little recourse for correction.

On the heels of complaints from public officials in Alabama counties in the downstream path of Atlanta, the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration in 1966 called to order an enforcement conference to discuss pollution of the Chattahoochee and its effect on the interstate waters shared by Georgia and Alabama. In response to the evident pollution problem of the river, brought on by the lack of effective action on the part of municipalities and industries, and its effect on both states, the conference brought together representatives from several federal agencies and the states of Georgia and Alabama to discuss what to do about managing the river's water.²³ Attended by an array of public officials from the affected states, as well as industry representatives, politicians, and the media, the conference was timed to both head off a more intense squabble between Alabama and Georgia (and potential inter-governmental lawsuits) and to

develop a plan for abating existing sources of pollution. The conversation began by acknowledging the role of the conference as a combined information dissemination session and problem-solving forum. Details about the scope of the pollution, and its sources, were presented, with an emphasis the effects of three wastewater treatment plants, all serving Atlanta: R.M. Clayton (by far the largest plant discharging into the river), Utoy Creek, and Sandy Creek. A limited selection of broad recommendations were presented at the conclusion of the meeting, most important among them being the setting of a timeline for building remedial facilities to control pollution flowing into the Chattahoochee by the middle of 1971. The effect of the meeting lay not only in the recommendations, but also in establishing a process for the airing of grievances.

The topics covered during the conference, the tone of participants, and the forthrightness of its recommendations reflected recent federal efforts to consolidate and improve national water policy.²⁴ The conference was a visible step on the part of federal government to establish and pursue a set of goals in managing water pollution in the rapidly growing southeastern river basins. This formal and public recognition of metro Atlanta's looming water problem was built on findings of a report published by the U.S. Study Commission on Southeast River Basins in 1963, which had recommended actions to improve flood control, municipal water supplies, and water quality. By entering directly into the growing conflict between Georgia and Alabama over mutually agreeable standards of pollution, the conference drew attention to the tremendous problem presented by the wastewater treatment plants serving the city of Atlanta, Dekalb County, Cobb County, and Gwinnett County, basically the urban core of the region. These jurisdictions represented both the largest users of the river for water supply and the

biggest polluters, contributing more than 60% of the total bacterial load entering the Chattahoochee at any single point. By virtue of its scale and growing visibility, the pollution problem of the stretch of river between Atlanta and Fort Gaines had moved to the top of the list of issues affecting the river by the mid-1960s.

A second enforcement conference was convened in 1970 to follow up on the progress of implementation of the pollution remediation recommendations published in 1966 and to review new developments in the river saga. In the intervening four years, conditions in the river had worsened. Recognition of the impact of metropolitan Atlanta's growing waste on neighboring watersheds, particularly the South and Flint rivers (both of which dump into the Chattahoochee several hundred miles downstream), and the lack of reliable data measuring the extent of this impact, spurred another wide ranging discussion on the future of the region's water supply. With the possibility of the involvement of federal courts looming, the second conference placed the pollution problem squarely on the shoulders of the major wastewater treatment systems in metro Atlanta. Noting the fact that the administration of waste treatment in Atlanta was divided among 20+ political subdivisions (though there are far fewer treatment plants), the keynote report delivered by the Water Pollution Control Administration argued that existing treatment facilities are "inefficient, uneconomical and poorly operated with respect to the water quality problems of the entire region," which was clear evidence of a dire need for "area regulatory planning."²⁵ In a relatively harsh tone, the conference proceedings provided testimony on the causes of "notable severe lapses" in completing upgrades to the treatment plants identified in the 1966 conference.²⁶

Comments by local politicians, wastewater operators, and consulting engineers revealed the complex technical and financial formulas involved in developing or improving water pollution treatment systems, compounded by the necessity of coordinating a group of quasi-independent agencies (even though those agencies were explicitly bound by a common set of federal and state rules). Despite the wide recognition of these difficulties, neither the state of Georgia nor the federal government had contributed much funding for improvements necessary to bring existing treatment plants up to a suitable level. Not surprisingly, the ranking federal official running the conference expressed obvious frustration at the progress of reform, commenting near the end of the meeting, “What you have to recognize is from 1966 to 1970 is a pretty long time. It seems to me in any case where the State of Georgia does not have a positive assurance that there is going to be compliance, I think these are the cases we have trouble with.”²⁷ A revised list of recommendations concluded the second conference, which outlined a 30-day window for municipalities and industries to notify the Georgia Water Quality Control Board (serving as a federal liaison) of the date when they expect to fully meet all the obligations established during the first conference. A later meeting between state water quality officials and the U.S. Department of the Interior would determine the acceptability of the compliance plans.

Expressing the confusion of managing intergovernmental relationships, initiatives for changing the practice of water planning came nearly simultaneously from regional bodies, state governments, and the federal bureaucracy. But despite efforts in the 1960s to initiate comprehensive documentation and plans for river basins that emphasized substantive issues related to the fate of specific rivers (i.e. the Chattahoochee), the

difficulties of intergovernmental affairs would resurface in the coming years and continue to confound attempts to find solutions to the tangle of problems associated with water resource management. With the opening salvos of what would escalate into a war over the rights to the Chattahoochee's waters, the connection between urban water supply systems and water pollution became a front burner issue that would color regional water resource planning efforts for years to come. These efforts would have a long-reaching influence. The on-going urbanization of the countryside, and the visible effects such urbanization had on rivers and streams, helped drive home the fragility of watersheds, and the impact human activities have on them. Atlanta's projected growth (and the likelihood of realizing this growth) would remain the primary issue in the water conflict between Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. As ARC took on a greater role in planning and coordinating water supply plan for the region, the agency worked to position itself as a central player in the heated negotiations that would characterize the interstate dispute.

Imagining Water Supply for a Region

In 1967 the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission, ARC's predecessor, hired an engineering firm to evaluate the water supply and sewer systems around metro Atlanta. Confirming much of what the Study Commission report and the two enforcement conferences had suggested, the engineer's preliminary report issued in mid-1968 evaluated each of the existing systems in the region, which collectively revealed the poor (or in some cases nonexistent) state of much of the region's infrastructure and facilities. However, the critique extended beyond the condition of the facilities themselves, to encompass the organizations actually operating the facilities.²⁸

The report also noted complications caused by the numerous agreements for cost-sharing and trading among the region's water and sewer systems.²⁹ At the end of 1968 ARMPC released two more reports, which put forth recommendations for building a fully functioning metropolitan water and sewer authority (tentatively named Northern Chattahoochee Water and Sewer Authority). These reports were built on the findings of the engineering report and contained elaborations of several rudimentary water and sewer policies included in the 1968 Regional Development Plan. Suggestions for the authority included an organizational structure comprised of elected officials representing member governments, much like the organization that would be adopted by ARC three years later. The proposed authority would be responsible for guiding and managing water quality, including operating existing and future sewer facilities, but would leave existing water supply systems in place in the hands of local governments.³⁰ Concluding remarks in the reports were clear, and provided a telling summary of what would likely lay ahead, especially after 1971 and the creation of ARC. Commenting on the fact that details of the problems with water supply and waste disposal had been written before, and that intergovernmental relationships were the key to solving the problems, the report asserted that the problems "are incapable of solution without the concerted action of many governments," an idea that would only be slowly worked out over the course of the next 30 years. By the time the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District was established in 2001, the fruition of these three decades of regional water planning was realized.

By the early 1970s, when the bill that would create the Clean Water Act was making its way through Congress, a number of different federal and state agencies began

looking to apply some of the ideas about region- and watershed-wide water resource planning expounded in the 1960s to a few demonstration cases. When the CWA was signed into law, two different agencies, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency, spearheaded the revised federal role in water planning, especially in urban settings. They interacted directly with state and local governments, but as a result of the requirements of existing legislation (A-95 program introduced by the 1968 Intergovernmental Coordination Act) concerning metropolitan areas, both agencies also worked extensively with regional planning bodies. In some respects analogous to the way watersheds cut across jurisdictions, the regional agencies were ideal points of contact between local, state, and federal representatives, mostly because they were large enough to span significant portions of watersheds, which allowed observation of how water demands from different jurisdictions affected the rest of the region. But regional planning agencies were also repositories with enough data and access to expertise to be able to examine complex water issues in the context of economic, demographic, and land development. And with ongoing research and development programs in areas that held important implications for the condition of the natural environment, namely transportation, adding water issues to their docket was an easy fit.

In 1972, the Army Corps and EPA, in conjunction with ARC and the State, initiated a new, multi-year water resource planning project in metropolitan Atlanta (officially named the Atlanta Region Water Resources Study, but often simply referred to as the Atlanta Study), that included part of the Chattahoochee and Flint river basins, as well as the two largest impoundments in the region, Lake Allatoona and Lake Lanier.

While part of a larger push to develop comprehensive water management plans in metropolitan areas around the country and redirect some of the effort of the Corps toward “software (nonconstruction)” roles, the Atlanta Study could also trace its roots to the work of the southeastern rivers U.S. Study Commission in the early 1960s. Problems (soil disturbance and runoff) stemming from residential development along the bluffs where the river separates Fulton and Cobb counties helped bring attention to the condition of the watershed.³¹ The activities that went into the Atlanta Study, the data gathering, public meetings, and mapping, would lay the groundwork for later efforts to broker a solution to water supply conflicts and provide input to plans for coordinating the relationship between land development and water quality. More immediately, the Study attempted to broker a solution to interim water supply conflicts while laying out several

longer-term plans for coordinating point-source and non-point source pollution with the water supply.

The legwork that went into the Atlanta Study helped ARC develop separate areawide wastewater and water supply plans with a relatively detailed timeline of procedural and infrastructure improvements forecasted through year 2000. These plans formed the basis for ARC’s A-95 reviews of

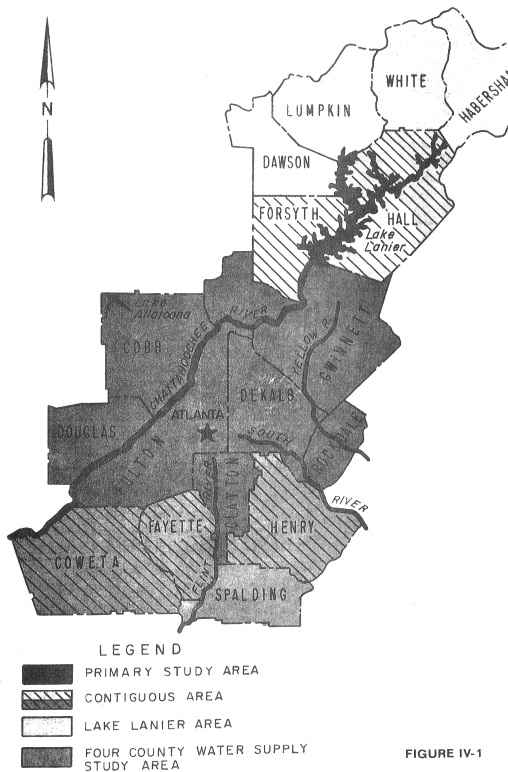


FIGURE IV-1
STUDY AREA AND
CONTIGUOUS AREA

Figure 4.1: Atlanta Study Boundaries

local government requests for federal funding for water supply and wastewater infrastructure. The Study proposed a detailed program for regulating the river's flow (to be managed jointly by ARC, the Corps, and Georgia Power) that would provide a medium-term reliable water supply for the jurisdictions with municipal systems that depended on the river. The study also included a sub-study of water supplies for several downstream counties that would later be sucked into Atlanta's metropolitan fold, and lent support to the idea of connecting the region's future water supply to Lake Lanier.³²

During the same period, using the cover of the Atlanta Study, ARC successfully pushed legislation through the Georgia General Assembly granting it development review authority over the 48-mile stretch of the Chattahoochee that flows through metropolitan Atlanta. The Study also helped stimulate efforts to pass Georgia's Erosion and Sedimentation Act (1975) and Surface Water Management Act (1977), which replaced a vague riparian doctrine of water allocation with a system of state-issued permits for withdrawals from rivers and streams of more than 100,000 gallons per day (a threshold targeted to Atlanta's four big water systems). And beyond the ideas enunciated in the course of the Study, the cooperative organizational structure necessary for the parties involved helped create a renewed climate of water awareness, establish the role of water planning within the growing pantheon of ARC's activities, and reinforce connections between the environment and other facets of regional development planning.³³

The Chattahoochee Corridor Plan and the Metropolitan River Protection Act

The general idea of a sub-regional plan backed by a state law specifically targeting the Chattahoochee had been widely discussed during the 1960s when federal

and state agencies first turned their attention to the pollution problems the river faced, though no specific details of such a law had ever been proffered. Early regional development plans, studies, and conferences had suggested the necessity of protecting the river from encroachment by mandating a prescribed distance between the edge of the water and any land disturbing activity (a natural buffer), limiting discharges into the river, and prescribing the types of land uses appropriate for areas along the river.³⁴ Though the plans and conversations produced potentially useful ideas, no governmental body, at the local, state, or federal level, had taken serious steps to encourage implementing the ideas, and the regional agencies responsible for writing the plans never seriously attempted to broker implementation in the face of what would have likely been fierce resistance. But by the time the state legislature created the Atlanta Regional Commission, public agitation for more aggressive water resource planning had begun to reach a crescendo. Media attention on the water supply problem in the region had increased sharply, and editorials decrying the failure of local governments to adequately address problems stemming from land development along the river created a drumbeat that gathered steam.³⁵ Dealing with this slowly exploding problem was, along with the Regional Development Plan update, one of the first tasks ARC undertook. The Commission's effort to develop a comprehensive plan for the Chattahoochee River corridor helped push the state into the complicated terrain of urban watershed management, and in retrospect formed one of the key events that would much later help propel Georgia's growth management legislation.

Behind the plan, where the quiet work of the bureaucracy unfolded, efforts to encourage cooperation among the local governments with a stake in river development

were responsible for establishing the seriousness of ARC's role in regional water planning. As publicity increased about the problems development along the river had created, and the apparent lack of thoughtful planning concerning that development, individual zoning decisions that several years earlier would have escaped notice turned into public controversies. These controversies stemmed from a spate of rezoning decisions by the Fulton County Commission. In a matter of only a few years, a series of small land development controversies involving one of the founding members of ARC crystallized the fate of future development within the Chattahoochee corridor, ARC's role in water resource planning, and the long-term legitimacy of the agency as the region's dominant development policy body.

In 1967, a developer with a history of turning the soil of north Fulton County into subdivisions and apartments proposed a moderate-sized development for a parcel adjacent to the river near a bridge that conveyed Interstate 285 over the water just north of the city limits in an unincorporated section of Fulton County. Situated in the midst of a low-density, single-family residential area, the development, a small-scale PUD (planned unit development), would have included a mixture of commercial and multi-family residential structures surrounded by greenspace to be held in a permanent public covenant. Despite generating a low level local outcry among local environmental activists, the project was approved by the Fulton Commission, and construction was underway in mid 1969. After preliminary work on the project began to take shape, and the deal's profit-making potential revealed, the developer went back to the Fulton Commission in mid-1970 requesting exemptions to the original covenants in order to bulldoze some of the greenspace to make way for devoting more of the land to

commercial uses. The Commission granted the request, again despite limited public protest, which also neutralized an existing agreement to put aside part of the parcel for a future public use area (part of an ongoing but separate effort to create a national park along part of the river).³⁶ Though the state got involved, with Governor Carter personally appealing to Fulton County for a voluntary moratorium on rezoning land along the river, the Commission nevertheless pushed ahead, spurring a group of Fulton Citizens to file an injunction in Fulton Superior Court to stop the development (which was granted). By the summer of 1971, the issue of river zoning was evolving into a full-blown regional controversy.³⁷ Wrangling continued through the winter of 1971 and early spring of 1972 over the Fulton Commission's decision to continue hearing rezoning applications without heading the oversight of the governor, as several other large-lot developments were proposed for nearby parcels along the river. As ARC was getting up and running, the issue of river development lay in wait.

In the 1972 session of the General Assembly, senator Robert Walling of Dekalb County, introduced a new bill that would have created a five-person board to oversee all re-zoning requests along the controversial northern stretch of the river (the section that ARC would propose for inclusion in its corridor plan). As ARC was beginning the task of organizing its operations in early 1972, it immediately enmeshed itself in the Chattahoochee conflict. In February, the ARC board met and passed a public resolution opposing the Walling's river bill based on concern that the law would supercede ARC's jurisdiction over planning and development in the Chattahoochee corridor, a power the Commission's executive director realized would be crucial to its legitimacy.³⁸ Immediately after voting to oppose Walling's bill, under the auspices of the corridor plan

and Act 5 the commission declared that the river was a cross-jurisdictional subject that fell under the area review powers granted the Commission.³⁹

While the first attempt at a river protection bill came about during the uproar over Fulton County's attempts to rezone valuable lands along the river for more intense development, the urgency of which might have squashed ARC's strategic concerns, the Commission managed to operate shrewdly to protect its role in the region. By the middle of 1972 the new commission had involved itself in the on-going re-zoning battles in Fulton, and had also begun the process of writing a Chattahoochee Corridor Plan that it could use to stake a more authoritative claim over development decisions along the river. Though it provoked disagreement, and some of ARC's commissioners even expressed surprise at the staff position on the river bill, making its opposition to the bill public was strategic, giving the Commission time to develop a comprehensive river plan that would meet fit its vision and be subject to its complete control. This effectively ended the bill's chances of passage during the 1972 session (Walling's bill was channeled to the natural resources committee in the senate and drowned there), but future prospects for a state-level river bill remained bright. With the public being denied visible progress, the defeat of the river bill helped keep the zoning controversy on the front burner.⁴⁰

In mid-1972, after ARC had formally adopted its Chattahoochee Corridor Plan, the Commission immediately invoked its authority to review pending development proposals for land along the river.⁴¹ This action put the commission on course for a head-on collision with the government of the largest county in its jurisdiction (which also happened to be the most urbanized county in the state). When members of the Fulton County Commission resisted ARC's attempts to review the development proposals, ARC

filed a law suit against the county in Fulton Superior Court alleging that the county commission had violated the state law that required ARC to review developments with potential areawide impact.⁴² Though ARC's executive director (Dan Sweat) knew the commission lacked explicit zoning review authority (and would likely lose a courtroom confrontation), and that the river development proposals might not even qualify as areawide plans, he quietly notified the senior Fulton Commissioner, who was also a member of ARC's board, that the Commission was ready for a long fight to against the county. After several months of controversy, and the threat of a petition drive to recall the members of the Fulton Commission, the Commission asked ARC to settle out of court. The settlement that was negotiated gave ARC the right to review development projects in the river corridor, but more importantly provided the Commission with valuable time while state legislation granting the agency more formal and far-reaching river corridor planning powers could work its way through the 1973 session of the General Assembly.⁴³

Among its achievements, the effort behind the Chattahoochee Corridor Plan identified a few simple mechanisms that could be used in subsequent efforts to promote regional coordination and further legitimated the existence of the fledgling ARC. The directness of these mechanisms emerged in staff reports prepared during the planning process and remained mostly intact in the text of the adopted version of the plan. What the staff reports understood was that much of the real power of the river plan would lay not in ARC's authority to deny a building permit, but rather in the extensive documentation required of proposed developments. Gathering detailed site and grading plans, showing land vulnerability ratings, existing vegetation, and erosion control

measures, required a great deal of effort on the part of a potential developer and opened avenues for negotiation and enforcement without going through a formal hearing. It also helped ARC build an extensive database of land development information, which would become useful support for passing sediment control legislation through the General Assembly and in later efforts to establish a regional water supply authority.⁴⁴

Yet by virtue of its focus on managing land development activities adjacent to the river, at its core the plan was really just a simple (but fancy) river buffer which could be easily displayed on a map. The buffer outlined ARC's jurisdiction as a 2000-foot swath on each side of the river, for 48 miles – from directly below Buford Dam south to the railway bridge at Peachtree Creek. Within this buffer, the corridor plan required all development proposals to be consistent with regional policies. Hence any development that included expenditure of public funds or government action or involved disturbance of land for the purposes of erecting a structure was subject to review by the commission, as well as copious documentation. The key feature of the corridor plan, the mechanism by which the buffer functioned, was the inclusion of a system of precise land vulnerability standards. Based on distance to the water's edge and flood hazard potential, seven graduated vulnerability categories outlined and defined land clearing and impervious surface ratios allowable for parcels in the river corridor. The vulnerability standards were sub-categorized into flood plains, flood hazard areas, and vegetative buffers. Permanent structures on land within the flood plain were largely prohibited. Within the vegetative buffer, the land within 50 feet of the water on both banks of the Chattahoochee and within 35 feet on the banks of any tributaries, trees and plants were to remain undisturbed, the only structures allowed were bridges, water supply infrastructure,

utility lines, and footpaths. Flood hazard zones permitted permanent structures, provided floors were two feet above the adjacent flood plain elevation and structural height was limited to 35 feet.

The gracefulness of the plan, its substantive focus on a singular geographic feature (the river) while concomitantly addressing a bundle of larger regional issues, was perhaps most apparent in the corridor map that accompanied the plan. The combined simplicity of the regulations and the visual directness of the map proved a useful tool for keeping track of land development. A real-life demonstration of the idea that mapping something is a necessary precursor to controlling it, the corridor map provided a crisp representation of the features within the plan's jurisdiction, showing the spatial relationships among individual parcel boundaries, existing land uses, water/sewer infrastructure, and topography. The map also included the vulnerability zones and projected where future development might go, including land that should be reserved as permanent greenspace. Because of the ease of distributing a graphic document, the corridor map proved to be an invaluable means of disseminating information about the river.

When ARC published its river corridor plan late in the summer of 1972, outlines of what would become its longer-term water planning strategy were beginning to emerge. Commission board members and staff worked to build consensus around the plan from the ground up, laying the foundation for ARC having a prominent role in the river's future, extending its authority, and setting a general pattern for how it would deal with the local governments it oversaw. After the board gave the plan a final green light, the document's procedural requirements were widely circulated among metro local

governments. By the end of 1972, the governments responsible for implementing the details of the plan had largely signed on, if not officially, at least unofficially, helping the plan gather momentum and direct more serious attention on the river.⁴⁵ Once the legitimacy of the river plan had been firmly established, ARC moved quickly to corner more power over river development and planning from the state. At the beginning of the 1973 session of the General Assembly, a revised version of the first river protection bill (Walling's bill) was introduced.

The revised bill, sponsored by Eliot Levitas (DeKalb County) and Paul Coverdell (DeKalb County) in the 1973 General Assembly, that became the Metropolitan River Protection Act passed quickly through the legislature and onto Governor Carter's desk (who had been a staunch supporter), but not until two attempts by members of the Assembly to weaken the bill were presented. The first, an amendment to reduce the width of the protection corridor from 2,000 to 1,000 feet, failed by a wide margin. But a second amendment designed to temper some of ARC's regulatory authority by allowing local governments under the jurisdiction of the corridor plan to override ARC's recommendations for modifying a development proposal with a simple majority vote of the elected body, rather than a super majority, passed.⁴⁶

In spite of these amendments, the overriding characteristic of the 1973 version of the bill was the fact that the new legislation put authority over river planning and regulation directly in the hands of ARC, a critical victory for the commission and the parties interested in extending state authority over land development. It had been one of the goals of the writing of the Chattahoochee River plan in the first place to firmly put ARC in control over planning the fate of region's primary water source. But in yet

another a instance of the delicate dance between the federal government, the Commission, local governments, and the state over control over planning and development, the bill did not give ARC formal zoning review authority (i.e. the ability to over-ruling a zoning decision by a member local government).

Nevertheless, the version of the Metropolitan River Protection Act that passed into law presented ARC with a new power base for sustaining its river corridor plan and managing the way local governments made decisions about land use and zoning within the 2000-foot river buffer. The legislation signed by Carter in 1973, know as Act 66 (House Bill 1093), required all political subdivisions within the area of the river corridor affected by the plan to submit proposals for development on land parcels within the corridor to the commission for review against the policies set forth in the plan. The law maintained the requirement that proposals be accompanied by detailed site plans, grading plans, and landscaping plans, which included mapping the location of vulnerability categories, existing vegetation, topography, structural footprints, and other associated land disturbing activities. Within 60 days of the submission of a proposal, the Commission would conduct a review to determine the proposal's consistency with the requirements of the corridor plan, and issue its findings to the appropriate local governments. During the review, local staff and sometimes the applicants themselves, typically met with ARC staff to discuss the proposal and commission findings before final action. For the governing authority to issue a certificate allowing land-disturbing activities to go forward, a proposal had to be found either consistent with the river corridor plan (by official vote of the ARC board), revised to meet stipulations suggested by ARC staff review (and then voted by the board), or overridden by a majority vote of

the full governing council (simple quorum did not apply). Later revisions of the Act, modified as stricter statewide sedimentation and erosion control policies came on line, would require even more extensive documentation in development proposals.

The Chattahoochee Corridor Plan and Metropolitan River Protection Act were both in part outgrowths of piecemeal federal attempts to develop a coherent national water policy. The work of the U.S. Study Commissions and the Corps of Engineers' Atlanta Study were both essential pieces of a larger, on-going regional water resource management scheme designed to allocate a relatively scarce water supply. As implementation of the Chattahoochee Corridor Plan unfolded, it gave rise to progressively stronger regional initiatives as well as helped encourage the state's assertion of its authority to determine how water should be protected and managed. The Chattahoochee Plan and the River Act were constructed to work together to shape development along the river. But perhaps as significantly, the process of writing the plans and figuring out how they could be implemented helped structure the Atlanta Regional Commission and its vision of what regional planning should be.

The river corridor plan exemplifies how Atlanta's regional planning bureaucracy has been able to massage local politics into a regional framework, and how regional decision making actually worked. Much like the ARC itself and its regional development plans, the power of the Chattahoochee Plan lies in the details of its structure, in the procedures for reviewing development proposals, and the way information flows between the commission and local jurisdictions. In short, ARC managed the planning process as a feedback loop. From its vantage, ARC was able to take a wide-angle view of development along the river: from initial proposal for projects to actions by local

planning staff to votes by the local governing bodies. The commission could gather and distribute information related to the process to different interested parties (especially governments and citizens) as it saw fit.

A Planning Success?

Almost before the ink dried on the Metropolitan River Protection Act, a push to find a more comprehensive solution to problems associated with development along the river came as perceived lapses in the jurisdiction of the Act were beginning to be reported. In late 1973, a special investigative committee created by the General Assembly issued a report that charged that ambiguity in the brand new legislation would make evaluating proposals for compliance difficult, and asserted that ARC had few resources to allocate to detecting violations of provisions in the act. The most obvious implication of the committee's report was that the act was insufficient to the task at hand, but this was not the only reading.⁴⁷

While leveling an important critique of the legislation, which would eventually lead to revisions, in other ways the report failed to recognize how ambiguity could provide a platform of power for ARC and the way it went about its designated regulatory duties. The commission's goal was to subject as much of the river corridor land to its review as possible, and leave little of the design of the development regulations up to the whims of local governments. By virtue of the ambiguity in the enabling legislation, ARC was left to devise its own standards and rules, and use whatever coercive powers were at its disposal. By putting the design of the review process in ARC's hands, local governments had little footing to influence the shape the review process would take,

which gave the commission relatively wide berth in setting standards for reviewing river developments.

By the mid-1970s, positive changes in the quality of north Georgia's lakes and rivers were being widely reported in the media, most of it attributed to the expanded regulatory role of ARC in guarding water quality and federal policy. Beginning in the mid-1960s, around the time of the expansion of federal interest, expenditures and policies targeting the effects of Atlanta's urbanization on the condition of the state's largest waterway grew substantially. Behind an infusion of federal money unleashed by the Clean Water Act, ARC and the state helped oversee a major renovation of water resource infrastructure. The region's largest wastewater treatment plants were upgraded and expanded to include secondary sewage treatment technology, which dramatically reduced the amount of pollution escaping into the watershed. Large municipal systems that only recently spilled significant amounts of raw sewage directly into rivers were treating 85 to 95 percent of pollutants by the end of 1975. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) set up a program that monitored and policed industrial discharges, which helped stem many of the most egregious corporate polluters. Yet in spite of obvious improvements, particularly in the Chattahoochee corridor, pollution remained an enormous problem, especially for the region's smaller rivers and tributaries. For instance, in the driest part of the summer, up to 90 percent of the water that flowed down the South River, a tributary of the Ocmulgee River that drains small portions of both the city of Atlanta and Dekalb County's wastewater treatment systems, was comprised of post-treatment plant effluent.⁴⁸ Such a level is unsuitable for human consumption, or even human contact, beyond any effect on the fauna of the river.

In 1975, Senator Elliott Levitas introduced a bill into the Georgia General Assembly that created the state's first comprehensive erosion and sedimentation policies. Supported by the newly seated Governor George Busby and passed by a wide margin in both the senate and the house, the erosion act established new standards for development along the state's waterways and reinforced EPD's water monitoring program. The act also necessitated modifications to the Metropolitan River Protection Act, strengthening the authority of ARC's development reviews and making willful noncompliance on the part of local governments more difficult. The changes to river protection legislation that accompanied passage of the Erosion and Sedimentation Act (1975) required governing bodies, in addition to a majority vote by the full membership, to obtain a written statement from the office of the director of the state Environmental Protection Division certifying that the plan provides a level of water protection equivalent to that offered by following the regulations in the Chattahoochee Corridor Plan, if they hoped to overturn one of ARC's recommendations regarding a development proposal.⁴⁹ Revisions to the act also more explicitly encouraged pre-proposal negotiations between developers, landowners, and ARC staff in order to reduce the likelihood of a potentially politically damaging confrontation between the commission and local elected officials. This new role for the EPD, as an additional enforcer of ARC's decision making authority, was due to changes wrought by the erosion act, but was also a result of ARC's influence with key state leaders who helped push the state into a more involved role in water planning.

After the regulations were put in place, the remaining major hurdle ARC and the state faced revolved around making the river act and associated water policies more difficult for local governments to circumvent. Targeting erosion and sedimentation

offered a simple mechanism through which the river act could be strengthened and extended, without re-writing the law from scratch. Soil erosion, often caused by negligent agriculture practices, had been a significant problem in Georgia for a number of years, but only by the middle-1960s (when the Water Quality Control Act was passed), as erosion caused by urban development practices was increasingly visible, did the state government find the political will to take the problem seriously. The 1975 erosion act required the governing authorities of every county and municipality to adopt an ordinance to establish acceptable practices associated with land-disturbing activities, but it provided few precise guidelines. Within a set of very general rules and regulations, act set a limit of two years for local governments to come up with their own erosion ordinance.⁵⁰ For places that failed to develop their own standards, the EPD was directed to assume responsibility for developing and implementing its own regulations, to be written on a case-by-case basis, depending on the situation of the jurisdiction. The new law also set up a permitting process, again with few specific state-level requirements; local governments had a great deal of leeway to design their own permits (as long as they did so). Any property owner proposing land-disturbing activities now would be required to secure a permit from the governing body, which in turn would submit the permit applications to the district office of the state soil conservation service for final review. The discrepancies between soil disturbing permits and erosion ordinances together meant ordinances and permits would likely vary by jurisdiction, at least to a certain extent. Notwithstanding local variability in the details of regulations, the state's decision to require ordinances and permits in the first place was the critical step in the regulation process. As if by natural accretion, each new regulation added a brick to the regulatory

framework that slowly engulfed the region. Each regulation offered additional exposure and recognition to the issue, eventually reaching the point that simply ignoring the effects of planning and development on watersheds was no longer plausible.

Together, the Chattahoochee River Corridor Plan, Metropolitan River Protection Act, and Erosion and Sedimentation Act, fomented by the Atlanta Study and the federal studies that preceded it, formed a firm legal footing for the development of the two most comprehensive and forward reaching water resource plans the Atlanta region had yet seen. Published as companion pieces in 1976, the *Water Supply Plan for the Atlanta Region* and the *Atlanta Region Areawide Wastewater Management Plan* envisioned a dramatically expanded role for ARC's umbrella in terms of water resource planning activities. Unlike many major U.S. cities, waste and supply share the same small source in Atlanta (the Chattahoochee River). The fragility of this relationship makes the case strong for planning waste and supply simultaneously. Though fruits of the Atlanta Study, ARC's water supply and wastewater plans were also designed to be consistent with the general recommendations for water resource management contained in the 1975 RDP, but provide much greater depth and detail, and shine a light on the complexity of the relationship between the twin problems of supply and disposal. Both plans also served to thoroughly catalogue issues related to water resources, using data gathered as part of the Atlanta Study, many of which had previously been identified but not effectively documented and described. But beyond being a mere encyclopedia of issues, the plans also forwarded and amplified a set of specific ideas for managing available water resources that would resonate through the region for years to come.

Following a style of thinking that had been standard intellectual practice in regional planning circles (drawing inspiration from the 1929 Regional Plan of New York), the analysis of the region's supplies at the center of the water supply plan was built on an extensive data gathering and compilation effort. The plan included characterizations of existing water sources, projections of future demand, and calculations of the amount, and potential sources, of water needed to sustain the region's expected growth. But the plan also included several important recommendations (some of which had appeared in other report), concerning the reclassification of Lake Lanier into a water supply and recreation source and further changes to Georgia's water laws.⁵¹ Adding water supply to the list of functions of the lake would open a large and reliable additional water source for the region's water delivery systems and primary water wholesalers to other jurisdictions (Atlanta, Cobb, Dekalb, Gwinnett). Rewriting the state's water laws would standardize and clarify who has rights to water and what those rights entail. Other suggestions tended toward smaller concrete actions, including reducing water consumption through better conservation, improving connections between systems (redundancy), exploring groundwater sources, expanding off-stream storage capacity, and limiting development near critical water supplies.

The wastewater management plan, prepared and published with the water supply plan in June 1976, used a different structure to convey its message, but reiterated ideas in the supply plan in the thrust of its recommendations. Because wastewater was the primary subject of the Clean Water Act and the funds it released, specifically through section 201 of the act, the level of federal involvement was considerably greater in planning and building wastewater infrastructure than in water supply, and reached more

directly down into the affairs of local government. Per the requirements of section 201, a few local governments had begun to develop their own wastewater facility plans by the time ARC's wastewater plan was underway. In an effort to ensure compatibility between its own plans and those of its constituent governments, ARC used these local plans in the regional process. In contrast to the top-down structure of the water supply plan, the area wastewater plan looked more like a bottom-up approach. The plan borrowed a range of policies from the constituent plans, including enhancing the level of effluent treatment (through updated technology), expanding the area available for land treatment (including recycling effluent), consolidating treatment facilities, increasing cooperation among area governments, and expanding service areas.⁵²

At the time it was published, point source pollution was the primary front in the war on water quality, and, accordingly, ARC's wastewater plan focused on point sources of pollution. But as the plan was being published, the specter of nonpoint source pollution as a quiet but major contributor to the future degradation of urban watersheds loomed just over the horizon. In the context of a regional wastewater plan designed to reduce watershed pollution, non-point sources presented a dilemma to achieving a reduction in part because the agencies, like ARC, in charge of developing regional wastewater plans lacked reliable data to accurately measure or evaluate the impact of runoff.⁵³ Not to mention the overall imprecision of the tools available to land developers and governments to reduce the problems caused by nonpoint sources. Only later would techniques sophisticated enough to measure the extent of nonpoint source pollution emerge that could be deployed on a regional scale.

A Region Leads A State

As state water policies became more sophisticated, they formed an important feedback loop with ARC's regional water planning process, each influencing the other. As Atlanta's impact on the quality of the state's waters had become unavoidable, the areawide water resource plans influenced subsequent action on the part of the State. The water supply plan helped pave the way for re-writing water withdrawal legislation (formally moving the state away from existing riparian doctrine), while the state Environmental Protection Division used the wastewater plan to guide the issuance of waste discharge permits.⁵⁴ Both plans were important inputs into the creation of new publicly protected recreation areas.

Coming on the heels of the 1976 regional water plans, the 1977 Georgia Surface Water Management Act codified the state's authority over any municipal or private withdrawals from surface waters in excess of 100,000 gallons per day. The legislation was largely directed at metro Atlanta, where conflicts over rights to withdrawal cast a pall over the entire Chattahoochee-Flint-Apalachicola Basin, the source of the water rights dispute between Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Because North Georgia lacked significant underground aquifers, surface waters offered the only substantial source of fresh water for metropolitan Atlanta. Yet state policies encouraging breakneck economic growth, mushrooming residential developments competing with offices and industrial parks for water supply, set a course for continuing conflict across the region. As a result of a sharply limited supply of surface water and a growing demand, most all major industries and municipal authorities were swept up in the legislation, which required them to apply for a withdrawal permit from the state Environmental Protection Division

(EPD). According to the act, the character of permits would be established on a case-by-case basis, giving EPD the power to tailor the amount of water individual agencies would be allowed to legally withdraw, without tying its hands in future cases. More importantly, EPD would have the authority to deny an application for increased withdrawals if it determined that a water source was over-subscribed.

At the same time, as federal interest in the allocation of the state's surface waters, especially the Chattahoochee, had become more widely known, the local office of the Justice Department began taking aggressive action to get a handle on development along the river. The fruits of this effort was a bill supported by local river advocacy groups, including the Friends of the River, ARC, Jimmy Carter (as both governor and president), and a collection of elected officials, to create a long, spindly national recreation area that overlapped the 48-mile stretch of river governed by the Metropolitan River Protection Act. The legislation was introduced by fifth district Rep. Andrew Young in the waning days of the 1976 session of the U.S. House. At first meeting resistance in the House from one of Young's fellow Georgia delegation members, Larry McDonald, a Cobb County Republican, and apathy among other members of the House Rules Committee, the bill did not pass until 1978, when it actively supported by President Carter.⁵⁵ The result was a permanently protected, 9,000 acre recreation area that snaked through some of metro Atlanta's toniest neighborhoods.

By the middle of 1981, the major work in the Atlanta Study was drawing to a close. If the report had a headline, it was the conclusion that with proper management, the Chattahoochee could easily meet the region's water demands until at least 1990, and likely until the year 2000.⁵⁶ But beyond that, the plan offered fee specific, immediately

implementable recommendations. Among the recommendations that were issued was reclassifying Lake Lanier as a recreational water body and developing a specific reregulation plan for waters below the lake (a new dam, about 25 miles below the Buford Dam, was proposed but later dropped from consideration because of shifts in river management priorities).

Despite the paucity of concrete recommendations, the influence of the study was significant because it convened an array of parties around the same issue, it afforded a large-scale data gathering effort, and it resulted in a number of significant spin-off studies, plans, and policies.

As I've described, both of ARC's regional water plans (water supply and wastewater) were spun off the Atlanta Study, as well as the state's surface water and waste discharge legislation. Less well known were a corollary study of water resources for four counties south of Atlanta (Coweta, Fayette, Henry, Spalding) that highlighted looming water supply issues, and offered strategies for dealing with a possible wave of population growth (several of which were implemented). And a separate flood reduction study for Peachtree Creek and Nancy Creek, both which flow through the most densely-built parts of the region, provided guidance for evacuation and flood proofing requirements for structures near the floodplain that could be affected. But as much as anything, the years of the Atlanta Study were a watershed period of inter-governmental coordination and action involving water planning issues. By virtue of the involvement of so many agencies in a single project, water resource planning in the state received a vital boost. The interactions during the study created a certain consistency of understanding among local planners and natural resource specialists (even if elected officials often

lacked the same understanding). As these planners later moved within agencies around the region, they took this experience with them, extending the reach of the ideas generated in the study for a number of years into the future.

The legacy of the actions of the organizations involved in forming state and regional water policies is visible in the urban landscape, yet there was no single moment or crisis that attracted widespread attention that shaped the plans and regulations that created the landscape. Rather, water policy was formed by slow accumulation over a number of years, making it hard to see exactly when and where important changes happened. As Atlanta's population grew during the 1980s and 1990s, the total amount of freshwater available to supply development did not change appreciably, though a few reservoirs were constructed to help regulate water supply in counties in the southern half of the region (recommendations of the Atlanta Study). How a limited supply of a critical resource could accommodate so much new demand lay in the confluence of supply technology, recreational activism, management, and a bit of luck. Despite long-standing claims that the region's water supply would run well short of anticipated demand, the day the region's millions of faucets ran dry never materialized. Water remained apparently plentiful. To be sure, technological advancements helped push improved efficiency of water delivery infrastructure. New water pipes suffered fewer leaks and less frequent breeches. Building standards, at the local, state, and national level, required adoption of low-flow water fixtures, and laws governing the manufacture of common water-using appliances stipulated increased efficiency. These factors held per capita water usage stable, even as total demand grew. But by themselves, technologies of efficiency cannot

account for how Atlanta's water has been able to accommodate such astounding growth during the last three decades (3.5 million additional people).

Neither can the activities of citizens groups nor the array of small organizations that sprung up to support various levels of resource conservation be credited with dramatically altering the allocation or management of water resources. The efforts of these groups, the Friends of the River most prominently, helped raise awareness of some of the issues facing the river, especially pollution, and they helped pressure politicians in some cases. Yet water management in the wake of the Clean Water Act had become a complex endeavor that community-based groups could not easily engage. They tended to pick their battles, along criteria that were visible and close to home. Thus their rather prominent role in pushing for the establishment of a national recreation area along an urban stretch of the river exemplifies how the amenity function of the river was put ahead of its status as a water source, and made for a compelling media story. In this way, developers and recreationalists were battling over one comparatively minor function of the river. Developers saw the river as a natural amenity that would enhance the value of future building projects. Existing homeowners and recreationalists also saw the river as an amenity, but one in which less development increased the value of their existing investments.

During these years, North Georgia avoided the kind of massive, extended drought that would have reduced water flow in the Chattahoochee and drained Lake Lanier. While most water resource engineers and climate researchers recognized the distinct possibility of a worst-case scenario drought befalling the state, and duly warned Atlanta's political leaders, rainfall kept the river flowing. Models show that an extended drought

would wreck havoc on the region's water supply systems. Various plans for new reservoirs were laid, but most of the proposed lakes were never built. With the exception of a brief drought in the early 1980s, Atlanta simply got lucky.

While public recognition of the river as a special amenity was important to drawing attention to its fragility and importance, the supporting actions of ARC and the state brought necessary resources to help sustain the river as a primary water resource for the region. Water resource management in the state of Georgia underwent nothing short of a (quiet) revolution in the 1970s.⁵⁷ Driven both by top-down changes in federal water policy and pressure bubbling up from different corners of metropolitan Atlanta, the state's water policy was pulled out of an old system of riparian doctrine based in common law to a modern system that handed control over withdrawals and discharges to wildlife biologists, limnologists, and water resource engineers. This change meant that at least in theory surface water in the state would be managed in a more systematic and predictable way, following along behind the development of state-of-the-art techniques and procedures.

The planners and politicians at ARC played an important role in this transformation of water policy. By virtue of its extensive participation in the Atlanta Study, its advocacy for and leading position in developing the Chattahoochee Corridor Plan, the Metropolitan River Protection Act, and the region-wide water supply and wastewater plans, the Commission assumed much of the responsibility of setting the stage for the state's new water policy. ARC used its influence in the state legislature to help shape state-level water regulations so that they matched up with the interests of metro Atlanta. The strange details buried in the regulations should not be overlooked.

Deep in the language of water policy were critical details that would influence how regulations could be interpreted and applied in real-world situations.⁵⁸ While the media and the general public often ignored these details, which offered little visible human drama or made for good headlines, they were well known among planners, developers, and key politicians.

A key feature of the regulations slowly worked out between ARC and the state was flexibility. Flexibility gave both ARC and the state Environmental Protection Division wide latitude in determining how concrete policies would be crafted and what tools would be used for enforcement. To a great extent, maintaining flexibility was critical to the success of instituting new water policy at all (as it was for implementing just about any policy that restricted land development rights). Introducing expansive new regulations in a state with a historical legacy of hands off environmental policy required a broad base of support and a slow hand, especially if those regulations had any hope of being passed through the legislature and implemented. One means of capturing such support was to include a wide array of stakeholders, even if they had apparently competing and conflicting agendas. The trickiness of this arrangement gave local governments an opportunity to feel like they were negotiating a major role for themselves, and their political constituencies, in the process of policy development. Folding these interests into a coherent policy framework required a certain degree of enterprise on the part of the agencies behind the effort, which generally meant relinquishing control over some part of the implementation of regulations to local governing bodies.

Dividing control of implementing a policy among different hands has upsides and downsides, which in the case of Atlanta and Georgia have been particularly visible with enforcement procedures. Enforcing environmental policy usually depends on local surveillance, which almost by definition needs to be precise and diligent. That's because land development at the level of the parcel is in reality comprised of a series of discrete operations, carried out separately but usually overlapping, often by different contractors, in the course of a short time. These activities include surveying, ground clearing, grading, foundation pouring, framing, wiring, plumbing, roofing, finishing, and landscaping. In terms of potential environmental side effects, the earth moving activities at the beginning and end of the process often define how successful on-site mitigation has been, but what happens in between can be equally problematic. Without good baseline data and a timely follow up by agents of the regulating authority, evaluating changes to sensitive land can be difficult, and permanent alterations can occur quickly and without much notice. The minor violations of environmental regulations that add up to major damages over time can only be detected by vigilant observation, a prospect complicated any time there is a condition of divided control (i.e. the agency that develops the regulations is not the agency that enforces them).

Widening Scope

Despite its shortcomings, water policy was another important moment in ARC's growth and maturation as an agency. By virtue of its wedge position between federal regulations, state laws, and local conversations about what the region's riparian future should be, ARC found another way to assert its legitimacy and establish a central role for

itself among the region's pantheon of planning agencies and interest groups. By taking up the mantle of regional water policy, the Commission strengthened its power to write and promote policies it favored. The role of the Commission in water issues also underscored the importance of the regional focus of federal policy during the 1970s. The string of new federal policies introduced during the decade, which included intergovernmental coordination, transportation, water, and air quality, either reinforced existing regionalist policies or created new programs that were designed to expand the duties of regional agencies. This policy push aided ARC's ability to serve as a regional information broker, convening parties around an issue (or set of issues) as the need arose. This role provided an official foundation and leverage for transmitting ideas to municipal bodies within the commission's jurisdiction and for encouraging their implementation.

Advances in water resource management in the 1970s introduced an important new dimension to regional planning in metropolitan Atlanta, one that would ultimately lead to the passage of mandatory comprehensive land use planning legislation in the second half of the 1980s. The importance of connecting environmental regulations (and water more specifically) to land use planning cannot be understated. In the early 1970s, the problem of watershed planning, particularly in urban and suburban areas, was beginning to challenge existing development practices across the country. The volume of debate in the U.S. Congress over the implementation of a national land use program, though having produced no signed legislation to show for the effort, indicated an approach to land use that leaned on existing water protection regulations for support.⁵⁹ With money available to attack water pollution, and enhanced tools to more precisely measure the levels of degradation of water sources, hitching the discussion of land use to

water quality made strategic sense. Water supply was after all critical infrastructure, a prerequisite for urbanization of any scale. When a few states began to take up the cause of making land use planning an important state government function, they did so also by leaning on the issue of water quality.

By the early 1980s, the idea of state-mandated land use planning had achieved a significant measure of support among metro-area legislators, and a few key officials from the rural counties that form a ragged fringe around Atlanta, one of who would be elected Governor in 1982. His election was the beginning of a slow elevation of the level of state involvement in water, air, and land use policy, even as the federal government was concomitantly in the process of deregulating industry and attempting to undermine many of the planning and regulation programs erected during the 1960s and 1970s. Yet at the start of 1990, Georgia had entered officially the ranks of so-called growth management states, an odd distinction for a place that was widely perceived as a backwater free-for-all for land developers. The role of ARC and its regional agenda in bringing mandatory comprehensive development planning to the entire state highlighted again the quiet power of the Commission and the lessons learned during attempts to exercise a form of coordinated regional planning in Atlanta.

¹ For a quick overview of some of the key environmental issues affecting the ACF basin and Apalachicola Bay, see Dara Wilber, "Associations Between Freshwater Inflows and Oyster Productivity in Apalachicola Bay, Florida," *Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science* 35, no. 2 (1992).

² Clarence Velz, "Apalachicola Basin, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers Water Resources Background Facts," National Council for Stream Improvement, University of Michigan, School of Public Health, 1953.

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- ³ For a general discussion of the history of the Chattahoochee River, see Lynn Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time: a History of the Lower Chattahoochee Valley* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999).
- ⁴ Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time*, p168
- ⁵ Georgia Government Documents Project (GGDP), “Interview with Dan Sweat, January 22, 1997,” by Clifford Kuhn and Shep Barbash
- ⁶ Velz, 1953, p44
- ⁷ Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time*, p168
- ⁸ See U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District. *1989 Draft Post Authorization Change Notification Report for the Reallocation of Storage form Hydropower to Water Supply at Lake Lanier, Georgia*.
- ⁹ Peter Rogers, *America’s Water: Federal Roles and Responsibilities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p10
- ¹⁰ *Intergovernmental Responsibilities for Water Supply and Sewage Disposal in Metropolitan Areas*, ACIR (1962)
- ¹¹ Rogers, 1993, p56
- ¹² Rogers, *America’s Water*, p58; *New Directions in U.S. Water Policy*, National Water Commission (1973).
- ¹³ Rogers, 1993, p33-36
- ¹⁴ Rogers, 1993, p65-66
- ¹⁵ Urban air quality was modeled based on transportation plans, while environmental impact statements became an important precursor to building transportation infrastructure. For more about this relationship, see David Currie, “The Mobile Source Provisions of the Clean Air Act,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 46, no. 4 (1979); Brian Stone, “Air Quality by Design: Harnessing the Clean Air Act to Manage Metropolitan Growth,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23 (2003).
- ¹⁶ C.E. Kindsvater, ed., “Organization and Methodology for River Basin Planning,” Proceedings of a Seminar Based on The U.S. Study Commission – Southeast River Basins, Atlanta, Georgia, 1964, p500, 517.
- ¹⁷ See “Plan for Development of the Land and Water Resources of the Southeast River Basins,” U.S. Study Commission – Southeast River Basins, 1963. For an extended discussion of the work of the commission after delivering its report, see C.E. Kindsvater, ed., “Organization and Methodology for River Basin Planning,” Proceedings of a Seminar Based on The U.S. Study Commission – Southeast River Basins, Atlanta, Georgia, 1964.
- ¹⁸ U.S. Study Commission – Southeast River Basins, p5-4.
- ¹⁹ U.S. Study Commission – Southeast River Basins, p4-35: “The Atlanta metropolitan area complex presents a difficult problem in the pollution abatement field. The cities in the Atlanta group are so located that drainage from the urbanized area is divided among the Chattahoochee, Flint, and Altamaha River basins. The metropolitan area is currently diverting about 200 cubic feet per second from the Chattahoochee, about 70 second-feet of which finds its way into the Altamaha and Flint basins as return flow or sewage-plant effluent.”
- ²⁰ U.S. Study Commission – Southeast River Basins, p5-3
- ²¹ U.S. Study Commission – Southeast River Basins, p179.
- ²² “Proceedings: A Conference In the Matter of Pollution of the Interstate Waters of the Chattahoochee River and its Tributaries, from Atlanta, Georgia to Fort Gaines, Georgia,” U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Water Pollution Control Administration, July 14-15, 1966
- ²³ “Proceedings...” p5
- ²⁴ Just after the report of the “Proceedings...,” the Water Pollution Control Administration was moved to the Department of the Interior.

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- ²⁵ “Second Session of the Conference in the Matter of Pollution of the Chattahoochee River and its Tributaries in the States of Georgia and Alabama,” U.S. Department of the Interior, Federal Water Pollution Control Administration, February 17, 1970
- ²⁶ “Second Session...” p226
- ²⁷ “Second Session...” p210
- ²⁸ ARCC, “Letter from Horner and Shifrin to Glenn Bennett, Executive Director of the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Commission,” January 24, 1968
- ²⁹ ARCC, “Summary of Preliminary Findings: Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Planning Atlanta Metropolitan Area,” prepared by Horn and Shifrin, January 1968, p5
- ³⁰ ARCC, “Preliminary Water and Sewer Report,” ARMP, December, 1968; ARCC, “Northern Chattahoochee Water and Sewer Authority,” prepared by Alston, Miller and Gaines, December, 1968
- ³¹ ARCC, *Metropolitan Atlanta Water Resources Study*, 1978; *Atlanta Constitution*, “River Zoning is a Hot Potato Not Likely to Cool for Awhile,” July 26, 1971
- ³² Though constructed to help manage flood control, by the mid-1960s Lake Lanier had begun to be transformed into a recreational amenity for the region and was increasingly viewed as a potential drinking water source. Convincing the Corps to designate the lake for recreational purposes would stem water releases that would otherwise be obligated to maintain power generation and downstream agriculture. *Atlanta Constitution*, “Report Concedes Lanier is Lake for Recreation,” 1975.
- ³³ *Atlanta Constitution*, “Study: Chattahoochee Can Meet Water Need,” May 24, 1979.
- ³⁴ The early Regional Development Plans, *Up... Ahead 1952 and Now... For Tomorrow* in 1954 both describe water resource protection as a high priority in the coming years.
- ³⁵ *Atlanta Constitution*, “Act on Area River Plan,” July 7, 1971; “Zoning on the River,” July 21, 1971. This phenomenon has been well documented at the national level in Adam Rome’s *Bulldozer in the Countryside*.
- ³⁶ *Atlanta Constitution*, “River Land Developer Old Friend, Cates Says,” July 17, 1971
- ³⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, “River Zoning is a Hot Potato Not Likely to Cool for Awhile,” July 26, 1971.
- ³⁸ *Atlanta Constitution*, “ARC Criticized for Opposing River Bill,” January 29, 1972.
- ³⁹ ARCC, Minutes of Conference on Regionalism, remarks by Dan Sweat, June 1985
- ⁴⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, “Zoning on the River,” July 21, 1971; *Atlanta Constitution*, “Fulton Lobbyist Fights River Control Bill,” July 28, 1971.
- ⁴¹ *Atlanta Constitution*, “Fulton-ARC Court Test Seen on Zones,” September 7, 1972.
- ⁴² *Atlanta Constitution*, “ARC Wins a River Plan Battle,” September 14, 1972; ARCC, “Memo from Dan Sweat to ARC Board,” September 22, 1972.
- ⁴³ ARCC, “Minutes of Conference on Regionalism,” remarks by Dan Sweat, June 1985
- ⁴⁴ ARCC, “Chattahoochee Corridor Plan,” 1981
- ⁴⁵ *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, “ARC Plan for River Gaining,” December 25, 1972.
- ⁴⁶ Another successful amendment clarified the right of any person or corporation to dredge sand from the watercourse provided no effluent discharge or erosion occurs as a result. See *Journal of the Senate*, Atlanta Georgia, Friday March 16, 1973.
- ⁴⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, “River Protection Lagging, Study Says,” November 21, 1973.
- ⁴⁸ *Atlanta Constitution*, “Clean Water: Lot Left to Do,” November 10, 1975.
- ⁴⁹ ARCC, “Summary Steps in Metro River Review Process,” 1982
- ⁵⁰ Georgia Laws, 1975 Session, General Acts and Resolutions, “Erosion and Sedimentation Act of 1975,” p994-1001
- ⁵¹ ARCC, “Water Supply Plan for the Atlanta Region,” July 1976, p38-43
- ⁵² “Water Supply Plan for the Atlanta Region,” p25-28
- ⁵³ ARCC, “Atlanta Region Areawide Wastewater Management Plan,” June, 1976, p24

⁵⁴ ARCC, "Atlanta Wastewater Management Planning Process: Plan of Study," December 1976, p1

⁵⁵ John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=30143>, accessed August 31, 2007; *Atlanta Constitution*, "River Park Bill Hopes Vanish," October 1, 1976. According to the *Constitution*, Larry McDonald had claimed, among other things, that the bill would harm homeowners along the river, that the state government should foot the bill, and that the federal government shouldn't be in the business of owning parkland.

⁵⁶ *Atlanta Constitution*, "Study: Chattahoochee Can Meet Water Need," May 24, 1979.

⁵⁷ The quiet revolution coined in 1972 in Bosselman and Callies, *The Quiet Revolution in Land Use Control*. The idea was revisited in Frank Popper, "Understanding American Land Use Regulation Since 1970," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 54, no. 3 (1988).

⁵⁸ As Robert Caro described, Robert Moses was a master of using the arcane and detailed language of legislation to create policies that normal legislators could not understand, or were too busy to bother trying. In some respects, bureaucrats in Atlanta and their political allies also used similar underhanded techniques to get rules passed and policies implemented. See Robert Caro. *The Power Broker* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974).

⁵⁹ *National Land Use Policy: Background Papers on Past and Pending Legislation and the Roles of the Executive Branch, Congress, and the States in Land Use Policy and Planning*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office (1972)

Chapter 5

Installing Growth Management in Georgia

Introduction

When the returns from the 1980 Presidential election were in, Ronald Reagan stood atop a ten percent margin in the popular vote. In defeating Jimmy Carter, Reagan had won outright the popular vote in all but six states, leading to a landslide victory in the Electoral College and dealing Carter one of the worst defeats of an incumbent president in the twentieth century. The patron of administrative reform, and Georgia's first and only President, was sent packing back to Atlanta. Reagan's self-proclaimed revolution officially kicked off January 20, 1981, when he uttered a few words in his inaugural address that would resonate throughout the next eight years: "government is not the solution to the problem; government is the problem."¹ When Reagan signed Executive Order 12372 in 1982, rescinding OMB Circular A-95 and restating the way the federal government should interact with local governments, his assault on the federal role in the public sphere reached all the way down into the internal workings of the nation's regional planning agencies.²

As Reagan worked to quash the remaining vestiges of the New Deal legacy, returns from the 1980 Census showed that the demographic shifts that had began to

define urban life in the United States in the 1960s had continued unabated through the 1970s.³ Though the long term migration of blacks out of the former confederate states appeared to be slowing down, the draining of large central cities of middle and working class whites showed little indication of reversal. Bolstered by the completion of the vast majority of the urban segments of the Interstate Highway system, people and jobs were leaving the urban core at a remarkable rate.⁴ In many places, there was little to stop them, and conversely much to encourage them. New houses on the periphery tended to be affordable and accessible to those with adequate means. Long distance automobile commuting suffered from little of the gridlock that would later come to characterize the life of the hapless suburban commuter. The journey from home to work in most places remained quick and painless. With jobs and housing and a cache of social institutions rapidly developing, picking up an entire household and reconstituting it along the urban fringe without missing a beat was easier than ever. As might be expected, suburbs ringing large central cities were booming.⁵

The 1970s had seen, in addition to the standard list of political and economic catastrophes, a number of innovations and policy changes that profoundly influenced the practice of regional planning. The Federal Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968 had instructed the Office of Management and Budget to set up the A-95 review program, an interlocking set of regulations that was intended to more firmly tie the actions of local governments to broader federal policies. In practice, the program worked like a prism, requiring local governments in urban areas to subject applications for federal financial assistance to a review by the area's designated regional planning agency, which would then package the application and the review and send it to Washington for a final

decision. The act was designed to sync with existing requirements for intra-agency review that had become standard practice in a number of federal agencies by the early 1970s.⁶

At the same time, the activities required of regional planning agencies had become considerably broader, encompassing individual environmental and transportation programs as well as the ways those policies interacted. The 1972 Federal Water Pollution Control Amendments (Clean Water Act), which opened new funding sources for building wastewater infrastructure, mandated the involvement of regional planning agencies, and helped push more coordination in the area of water resource planning.⁷ Changes to federal transportation policy in 1970, 1973, and 1975 had broadened the role of regional planning agencies in a number of ways. The revisions established a federal urban highway system, mandated more consultation between federal, regional, and local agencies, required compliance with stipulations in the 1970 Clean Air Act Amendments, and opened the Highway Trust Fund to mass transit expenditures (at the discretion of the state/regional agencies responsible for distributing funds).⁸

Leveraging the publicity stemming from the Congressional debates over Senator Henry Jackson's bill to establish a national land use law, new planning initiatives appeared in a number of different places (though in most cases resulted in no legislation) and opened conversations about the shape future development should take. While the national land use bill never made it to law, the debates surrounding the bill highlighted an array of issues that would prove important to subsequent state-level efforts to institute comprehensive planning laws.⁹ Driven in part by the evolving environmental movement, state-level planning initiatives capitalized on growing citizen interest in and

understanding of environmental issues, and concomitant discontent with the impact of urban development on fragile natural resources.¹⁰ The introduction of mandatory comprehensive planning laws in Oregon in 1973 offered a demonstration of an aggressive new stance toward regional and local planning.

Oregon's law, with its relatively strict and top-down requirements, presented one model for how states might take a leading role in the control of land development, a model that was oriented toward preserving valuable agricultural land and organized growth controls around a collection of regional planning agencies. The comprehensive reach of the Oregon law meant that no county or municipality was exempt. Every jurisdiction was required to prepare a plan and submit it for state approval. In some respects, Oregon's law could be read as a state's response to the federal regulatory buildup of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it could also be read as a necessary step toward filling the void that would be left behind when the failure of national land use policy began to appear imminent.¹¹

As a few other states moved to deal with the issue of land use control, Georgia embarked on its own rather lengthy journey to restructure the relationship between the federal government, state bureaucracy, and local governments. The bill the General Assembly passed that came to be known as the Georgia Planning Act (GPA) had its origin in the early 1970s during Governor Jimmy Carter's attempts to streamline and professionalize the state's public bureaucracy. As part of Carter's wide-ranging effort to reorganize state government, a new Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and a substantially reconfigured Department of Community Affairs (DCA) emerged. In the process, Carter also created a temporary growth and planning commission, charged with

developing a strategy for writing a state land use planning law that would fit the requirements of the national land use policy that was then being debated in Congress (and many hoped would pass).¹² While Carter's growth commission failed to produce workable legislation, the idea had long legs.

After years of debate, comprehensive planning legislation was finally signed into law in the summer of 1989. By that time, the state had firmly established its authority over water and air quality and had built a comprehensive framework of regional development authorities (the Atlanta Regional Commission being the crown jewel). The authority of the planning act branched out from this regulatory base, leveraging existing water laws and using the twelve regional development authorities as a crucial middle-ground, and mined ARC for intellectual capital. Surface water protection laws provided entree for the state to stake its authority and interest in local planning, but the regional development agencies provided the necessary organizational infrastructure for getting the legislation off the ground, building up a critical mass of planning expertise, and implementing the resulting policies.

As the largest and most capable regional planning agency in the state, the Atlanta Regional Commission played a critical behind the scenes role in the development of laws that comprised the Georgia Planning Act. The process of local plan reviews the Commission learned to perform during the 1970s formed the heart of the regulations contained in the final version of the GPA. The standards by which local plans would be reviewed were developed and tested by ARC in its jurisdictions, and the substantive information that would form the basis of local plans was developed and promulgated by Commission planners. State legislators with close connections to ARC and the

metropolitan area were responsible for introducing state planning legislation and ushering it through the General Assembly, and Joe Frank Harris, the Governor who signed the GPA into law, had been an important supporter of creating a more comprehensive regional planning agency in metropolitan Atlanta in the days surrounding the creation of ARC. Together these factors underscore the long-term role the Commission played in brokering planning in metropolitan Atlanta, its position in managing inter-governmental coordination, and in encouraging the bringing forth of state power to issues of land development.

The A-95 Program

When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act in the summer of 1968, and immediately directed the Office of Management and Budget to bring forth a set of guidelines to implement the new law, the country was in the middle of a vast expansion of federal oversight of local and state government activities related to land development. Having recently experienced the problems of local and state compliance with federal policy during the crest of the Civil Rights movement, Johnson's administration understood that directing large quantities of program-specific money from federal agencies to local governments would likely prove to be rife with potential for mismanagement and abuse. Hence the terrifically complex factors affecting the condition of the built environment sparked a rather lengthy discussion of how the federal government should manage the nation's increasingly problematic metropolitan landscape and head off potential political roadblocks.

The Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) had issued a series of reports beginning in the mid-1960s arguing that a more stable framework for managing and implementing federal programs was needed, particularly those involving the distribution of funds for planning and building infrastructure (which was reaching a crescendo). Examining the condition of local and state building codes, the fiscal relationships between central cities and suburbs, and recent episodes of urban unrest, the ACIR reports collectively provided a critical examination of the state of American government.¹³ Because the ACIR worked closely with Congress and the President, the sense of crisis in the reports was able to reach the highest political levels. In its 1968 annual report to Congress, the ACIR forcibly asserted that the “American political system - and in turn federalism and the federal system - was on trial as never before in the Nation’s history with the sole exception of the Civil War.”¹⁴ The report argued that the mushrooming poverty afflicting the nation’s urban areas stemmed largely from the manipulation of federal policies by the decision-making bodies of local governments, and that the federal and state role in dealing with iniquities between and within metropolitan regions deserved serious reconsideration. The primary recommendation the report made to the 90th Congress was to pass the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, a bill previously introduced by Senator Edmund Muskie in 1966 and 1967 but had failed to pass. Intended to restructure intra-government relationships as a step toward finding solutions to the national crisis, the bill was based on ideas accumulated in over several different ACIR reports. It was designed to operationalize the recommendations of those reports concerning the disbursement of federal grants and land acquisition policy.

Upon passage of the Act, the President directed OMB to come up with a way to codify the array of issues contained in the new law, the result being the issuance of Circular A-95 in 1969. A document written to explain in detail how coordination among different levels of government should unfold, the circular was also designed to publicize the new statutes upon which its authority rested. The A-95 program was premised on the idea that communication is the critical piece of coordination, and that forcing different levels of government to communicate would have the effect of increasing cooperation, while leaving specific details about what constitutes cooperation up to the affected parties. At issue were the procedures for distributing the largesse of the growing number of federal grant programs pumping money from federal coffers into state and local agencies. While these kinds of dry procedural activities rarely receive much attention in the media, the circular was nevertheless an important effort to bring focus to the background issues of coordination among different levels of government, especially the pathways through which federal agencies interact with the state and local governments that were largely responsible for overseeing the implementation of urban policy. With the glut of new federal policies, and almost every one with a different set of requirements that local and state governments would be expected to meet, what had been a slow breakdown of communication among the dizzying array of bureaucratic arms turned into a rather acute situation of confusion and acrimony.¹⁵

The response the A-95 program offered was to reposition (or promote) regional planning agencies as the primary point of contact between federal programs and state/local recipients. Among the specific provisions contained in the circular, two most clearly signaled the change in status of metropolitan planning organizations. One was the

wholesale expansion of the grant review function that had been instituted by the Model Cities Act in 1966 and reinforced in the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969.¹⁶ In order to qualify for Model Cities funds, metropolitan areas had to designate a regional planning agency to review all local applications for funding. If an agency already existed, it need only be designated; if none existed, an agency had to be created whole cloth. Without a review agency in place, metropolitan area governments would be cut off from receiving Model Cities funds. NEPA now would require sign-off by the regional agency on all local government applications for funds to construct water treatment facilities. The A-95 circular reinvigorated and expanded the review functions that substate regional planning agencies would be required to take on, providing additional structure to the process of how reviews of funding requests should proceed.

The second was something called the Project Notification and Review System, which required state and regional governments to comment on virtually all grant applications for federal funds related to physical development (i.e. infrastructure) and human resources filed by constitute local governments. Serving both an early-warning function and a forum for conversations across jurisdictional lines, the notification system underscored and reinforced the existing clearinghouse function of regional planning agencies. Other important parts of the circular explicitly (strongly) encouraged each state to establish a system of substate planning districts that would provide a consistent, overlapping administrative framework for channeling money and information between federal, state, and local development programs.¹⁷ While the Act did not specify precisely how program reviews would operate, it did mandate the federal grant programs that were to be included in the review process and the chain of interactions that needed to occur for

a sufficient review to take place. It also included suggestions for the subject matter that review comments and recommendations should consider. These requirements implicitly structured at least some of the characteristics the review agencies would need to possess, at the very least in terms of staff expertise and capacity. Together, these rules and requirements privileged the regionalist perspective and regional planning organizations. Revisions to the circular occurred during the 1970s, changes which increased the number of federal programs requiring review and made civil rights and environmental concerns more explicit parts of the review process.¹⁸ And these revisions would also have a direct bearing on the origin of the Georgia Planning Act.

Though it was around for only a dozen years, the overall efficacy of the A-95 program, and its affect on regional planning agencies and the metropolitan landscape, became the subject of a great deal of internal discussion, the topic of a number of ACIR and OMB reports and evaluations over the course of the 1970s.¹⁹ Yet even by 1980, consensus on the effect the program was having on intergovernmental relations remained elusive. For its part, Atlanta's regional planning agency praised the program's ability to improve and organize communication among local governments.²⁰ Other observers contended that substate regional planning had "moderated the effects of fragmentation, if not the fragmentation itself," yet most agreed that in spite of the reforms, "federal regional policies remain[ed] complex."²¹ Though the number of federal programs covered under A-95 continued to grow during the 1970s, the perceived ability of the program to cut through the confusion of so many different sources of funds and policies remained suspect in the eyes of many. Overall federal interest in substate regional coordination had certainly grown, but evidence persisted that indicated that federal policy

remained split between supporting multi-purpose regional clearinghouse agencies and specialized, single purpose programs, an indication that the A-95 program was not doing everything that it should.²²

National Land Use Debates

Beginning in 1970, a well-publicized debate unfolded in Congress over whether the U.S. needed a comprehensive national land use policy. The consensus among most researchers and policy analysts and a number of politicians was that controlling land use should become a critical part of the conversation about how to get a handle on two other significant problems associated with urban development patterns: environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality.²³ The seriousness of the issue could be seen most readily in the efforts of Senator Henry Jackson (D-Washington), chairman of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, to bring a comprehensive national land use bill to the floor of the Senate between 1970 and 1974. Writing in 1972, Senator Jackson claimed that, “environmental crises, energy crises, indeed most of the domestic crises with which the media confront us, can be traced to decisions as to how our land is used.” When the Nixon Administration responded by offering its own version of a land use bill, it became clear that a public debated about a “national land use crisis” was in the offing.²⁴

In terms of the federal involvement with the forces that shape the national landscape, engaging land use was envisioned as the final point of a feedback triangle, the first two being transportation and the natural environment. In the post-war period, federal policy had extended its reach into transportation infrastructure planning and made

significant headway into environmental protection, particularly water resource planning, but the issue of direct federal incursion into land use and land development had been more or less submerged since the 1930s.²⁵ But as the rising environmental movement brought attention to the often severe externalities associated with modern land development practices, and the overall growth in the extent of development along the urban fringe, how land should be used looked to be an unavoidable federal issue.²⁶

The context in which the debate about an umbrella land use bill was framed in part by the recent proliferation of federal policies that touched land use issues in indirect ways. Both Jackson's bill and the Nixon Administration's counter were built around the idea of reforming the state and local decision-making context, one that would help build a bank of planning expertise and data. Both bills played off fears of compromised environmental quality. Both proposed using federal grants-in-aid to designate a system of state-level land use planning agencies as instruments of delivery. Both were fiercely debated.²⁷

But while the administration backed bill would have created a relatively passive law, one that was largely decentralized and would have provided the opportunity for state designated land use planning agencies to apply for planning funds from the Department of the Interior to develop and implement their own land use plans, Jackson's drafts went much further toward creating an active administrative infrastructure. His bill called for the establishment of a permanent land use council, which would include the Vice President and Cabinet Secretaries, which would oversee the nation's land and water resources at the highest political level. The council Jackson's proposal envisioned would fund on-going study of national land use patterns, coordination of federal planning

programs, national water supply, and river basin protection, reported periodically to the President and Congress. Other details included establishing a collection of river basin commissions and an explicit national land use policy backed up by a program to provide grants to state and regional planning agencies. The council would also be responsible for reviewing state land use plans and compiling and maintaining a national land use database.²⁸

The debate over the competing national land use policies lasted through four full sessions of Congress. After legislative impasse in 1970 and 1971, in 1972 and again in 1973 a compromise bill that attempted to combine the concerns of both Jackson and the Administration was introduced and passed in the Senate only to founder in the more scabrous environment of the House. By the time the compromise bill was introduced for the last time early in the 1974 session, it had been scaled down to rather modest proportions. But even with the exclusion of serious penalties for states that refused to adopt sufficient land use controls, and reducing the federal role largely to overseeing the distribution of grants to the states, opposition to national land use policy remained just staunch enough to prevent the bill from passing. With the sudden resignation of Nixon and the competing demands of the energy crisis and economic inflation, as well as Jackson's decision to seek the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 1976, the remaining momentum behind the land use bill dissipated. Though Carter Administration brought a background and interest in the role of land use in sustaining the environment, by the time Carter took office in 1977 the national conversation had moved off in other directions, responding to matters that appeared more pressing.²⁹

In some ways, the failure to pass an explicit national land use planning policy helped undercut the long-term fate of the A-95 program. The review and comment process that the circular mandated would have received a significant boost from a national land use policy that required states to demonstrate that their planning efforts were coordinated with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, the HUD 701 program, as well as the array of federal transportation planning programs, all of which were subject to the A-95 review process. This is not to say that the review program could not succeed without the national land use policy, but that the failure of the land use legislation robbed the review program of a power that would have made subsequent attempts to suspend it difficult. As part of a thicket of regulations that attempted to direct a substantial number of federal domestic policies into a regional framework (even if it was a rather chaotic framework), a formal land use policy would have served as a particularly strong lever for a more thorough transformation of the practices of urban development. It would have given intergovernmental coordination an extra stick with which to encourage closer cooperation of local and state governments.

When Reagan rescinded Circular A-95 in July 1982, he removed an important leg from one of the most extensive federal efforts to encourage substate regional planning. While the words in Executive Order 12372 lacked the caustic edge that Reagan often used to describe (and denigrate) the work of the federal government, the document directed Federal agencies to “support State and local governments by discouraging the reauthorization or creation of any planning organization which is Federally-funded, which has a Federally-prescribed membership, which is established for a limited purpose, and which is not adequately representative of, or accountable to, State or local elected

officials.”³⁰ By aiming to squelch federal support for planning organizations, and make those that already existed accountable to local elected officials, the order excised the heart of many of the regionally focused programs and policies created during the previous two decades, and took away the tools that regional agencies had used. Aside from the political imperative of shrinking the federal government, disagreement about the effect of the A-95 program in reducing the overall complexity of the 200 plus federal grant programs that had a planning component and the methods used to guide local governments in obtaining and using funds from the programs, emerged as important parts of the argument for suspending the OMB circular.

Giving state and local governments, especially local elected officials, more control over how federal programs would be operated and assistance would be allocated, ostensibly meant that top-down policies needed to be better tailored to the specific conditions of each place they touched, an idea with considerable political appeal. This was a core tenet of Reagan’s Federalism.³¹ But the effect of reducing federal oversight of and engagement in inter-governmental coordination efforts also left the door open for local governments to wield significant power in manipulating the goals of federal financial assistance programs to their own ends (precisely what the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act was created to combat). Pulling the plug on the A-95 offered a comparatively easy demonstration of how the Reagan administration would go about redefining the role of the federal government without involving the Congress. It also presented an opportunity to disrupt lingering coordination requirements attached to the Model Cities and Intergovernmental Cooperation Acts. And it created a power void,

which would be filled by a motley variety of local laws, business coalitions, and non-profit organizations.

Absent clear federal leadership, the disputes among the different levels of government involved in the development process escalated during the 1980s, leading to what could be described as a partial re-assertion of authority by the states. Moreover, the rise of state planning legislation came at the end of a period of general modernization of state government – the longer term fruit of efforts begun during the 1970s to reform bureaucracies and rewrite state constitutions. The confluence of these trends meant that by the end of the 1980s, seven states had passed legislation that mandated some form of local land use planning, joining the ranks of Oregon and Hawaii, which had passed mandatory planning laws in 1961 and 1973, respectively.³² Though the programs differed from state to state in terms of the issues that should be included in the plans, the process of establishing compliance, the role of regional agencies, and the process of achieving coordination among local governments, the collective effect was to confront the problem of growth management at the point where the federal government had relinquished some of its authority.³³ At the same time, the accumulating effects of growth and development continued to spill from one political jurisdiction to another, even as local governments were often unable or simply unwilling to deal with the consequences of their decisions.³⁴

Along with Georgia, the states that passed comprehensive planning legislation during the 1980s included Florida, New Jersey, Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island. Each of the state programs adopted elements from Oregon's genre-defining 1973 planning act, and they all shared at least a few common characteristics, but as a result of the idiosyncrasies that invariably emerge from the legislative process, they also ended up

being sufficiently different enough from each other to present different models of how growth management can be structured. As befits a source of inspiration, Oregon's growth management laws reached further to restrict and control growth than any of the subsequent efforts, yet in many respects the basic form of Oregon's law found its way into other state efforts.

Perhaps what made the form of Oregon's law inspiring was the clarity and straightforwardness of its regulations. In simple terms, they mandated the preparation of local land use plans, established growth boundaries around the state's cities, set up intermediary regional agencies, and provided a path for the state to enforce plans if local governments resisted.³⁵ The law also established a statewide plan to which all local plans would be required to demonstrate consistency. Utilizing the fragile resources of the Willamette Valley as a point of departure for establishing broader environmental protections across the entire state, Oregon created a state-centered, state-dominated model that combined local and regional planning, one that relied on public regional planning agencies, penalties, and legal proceedings to force compliance, with less room for cooperation.³⁶

Among the issues enunciated in the Oregon plan around which subsequent state efforts tended to diverge the most was the appropriate role of the state bureaucracy and methods of ensuring cooperation. A politically sensitive issue in most places, state power was perhaps nowhere touchier than in Florida and Georgia. Of the group of early growth management states, only these two could properly be called Sunbelt states, rapidly growing and harboring a social and political history seemingly hostile to virtually any kind of centralized land development regulations. Both states had long bouts of

economic depression and domination by rural legislators. Both had experienced sustained population influx beginning in the late 1940s, and comparatively meteoric rises in prosperity. Both possessed extensive and fairly fragile surface water resources easily threatened by development.

Florida moved first to devise an institutionalized response to the pressures of growth. The state's legislature kicked off what turned out to be a long process of building a comprehensive body of planning legislation in 1967 (pre-dating Oregon), and over the course of the next seventeen years passed a series of regulations to deal with the effects of growth. The statutes together formed a barrier of planning designed to create links across local, regional, and state governments.³⁷ While Florida's web of planning laws was complex, two comparatively simple features stand out. One was the idea of identifying places with particularly fragile environmental characteristics (areas of critical state concern) and the other was targeting large-scale developments that had obvious, cross-jurisdictional impacts (developments of regional impact) for special consideration.³⁸ Though used in only a few instances, areas of critical concern were meant to require heightened planning requirements tailored to sensitive environmental resources identified by the state's community affairs department. Developments of regional impact were projects that were expected to have effects (traffic, pollution) that crossed county boundaries, and thus required a more detailed review by regional planning agencies and the state.³⁹ Conceptually, both critical concern areas and developments of regional impact have their origins in the broader environmental movement. And both concepts came to play a role in the final form of Georgia's planning legislation.

Jimmy Carter and the Idea of Growth Management

When Jimmy Carter assumed the Governor's office in January of 1971, he promised a number of changes to the way the state of Georgia would be administered. Carter had won the election by presenting himself as a post Civil Rights politician, a reformer who understood the necessity of modernizing the state's political climate and rescuing Georgia from the grips of Lester Maddox and the old guard he represented. In his first "State of the State" address, Carter noted not only his intention to end the politics of discrimination, but also his desire to streamline state government and improve the environment. He claimed that there were "more than twenty agencies responsible for the inventory, preservation, conservation, utilization, enjoyment, and development of the our natural resources," all of which exemplified "the need for reorganization of government." By putting an agenda of reorganizing the state's bureaucratic departments front and center in his administration, which would include natural resources, community affairs, and transportation, Carter took his role as an administrative reformer seriously. The reorganization plan he presented called for a thorough rearrangement of the executive branch, including the creation of the state's first department of natural resources, transforming the state highway department into a more robust department of transportation.⁴⁰ Also included in this campaign for better government was Georgia's response to the national land use policy debate.⁴¹

By the middle of 1972, Carter's efforts were showing clear payoffs. At the end of the 1971 legislative session, he signed Act 5, creating the Atlanta Regional Commission. At the end of the 1972 session, he signed bills establishing the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Transportation. Carter supported and signed

the Metropolitan River Protection Act during the 1973 session, combining the efforts of ARC and the state to control development along a critical northern stretch of the Chattahoochee River.⁴² By the time Carter entered his third year in office, he could boast about his success in natural resource preservation. With all this major legislation under his belt, in his third State of the State address Carter could proclaim that Georgia had “a unified, well planned and coordinated single department to enhance the protection, development, enjoyment, and use of our natural resources.”⁴³ Continuing with his promise to transform the state’s role in the regulation of the environment, in 1974 he successfully pushed through additional funding for the DNR to be able to expand its inspection programs to enforce air and water quality regulations. And as part of his legislative program for his final year in office, Carter proposed the creation of a commission to address planning and development. As a unit within the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget, Carter’s “Planned Growth Commission” would have supported greater involvement by the state in issues of land use and local planning.⁴⁴

But, despite previous success, the Governor’s commission struggled to find an effective public voice, coming on line just as the volume of the national land use debate in Congress was being muted, and just as Carter was focusing his eyes on a run for President. As a result, the commission failed to generate much traction during the year of its existence. Casting its prospects in a relatively modest light, the group’s chairman, Joel Cowan, a local planner turned developer who had spent a number of years working for the regional planning agency that predated ARC, as well as several local governments, suggested that the goal of the commission was simply establishing “an ongoing study process,” rather than producing concrete land use legislation.⁴⁵ In spite of

its struggles to reach even a modest goal, the commission's membership included several legislators and citizens who had played a significant role in the politics of metropolitan planning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and several others who would go on to positions of influence in later efforts to institute growth management. But the notion of the commission as a piece of a larger process that would promote change over time proved rather prescient, as one of the members of the commission, Joe Frank Harris, would go on to be elected governor in 1984 and oversee passage of the bills that would form the Georgia Planning Act.

As Carter was leaving office, the state was in the midst of suffering from the same problems of energy supply, inflation, and unemployment that consumed the rest of the nation (and Carter's subsequent term in the White House).⁴⁶ Legislative efforts that might have supported statewide land use and development planning were subordinated to more pressing economic issues. Bills that would have further reorganized the framework for transportation and environmental planning in metropolitan Atlanta failed to produce lasting change. And Carter's legacy of enthusiasm for administrative reform and environmental protection did not exactly make the transition to George Busbee, an experienced legislator who won the 1974 election for governor but who championed himself more as a reliable steward than an innovative leader.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the idea that the state should be more intensively involved in development planning had been planted, an important step even if it would not bear fruit until the next decade.

The journey from Jimmy Carter's suggestion, in the twilight of his only term as governor, that Georgia needed an executive branch agency that would be directly involved in land use planning and local land development, to the passage of the bills that

became the Georgia Planning Act was, like every other part of this story, marked by a series of incremental steps, each moving the state a little bit closer to a more comprehensive view of its role in governing physical development. Most of these small steps involved strengthening water and air quality regulations, which came down from the federal level in bits and pieces. But in the small voids that often develop where levels of government come together, the realm of intergovernmental relations, the states assumed a significant role in the implementation of these laws, and within this wiggle room Georgia put together a series of erosion and sediment control acts, largely administered by DNR, that would form one of the pillars of later comprehensive planning legislation. First placing land development regulations within the state agency responsible for monitoring and protecting the natural environment marked the beginning of an indirect approach to land use planning, lending a degree of authority and creating a source of financial support to an issue that had often proved politically unpopular.

With the change in gubernatorial administration in 1975, the visibility of environmental and land use planning issues was diminished, but certainly not vanquished. Governor Busbee focused much of his political energy (spread over two consecutive terms, from 1975 until 1983) on reforming the state's public education system and promoting economic development, an agenda not necessarily at odds with Carter's administrative reforms, but one that valued gradual change and improving existing programs over deep transformation.⁴⁸ Though lacking the kind of focused leadership that Carter had provided, between 1975 and 1980 the role of the state in planning for land development remained a fixture of discussion and debate within the Georgia General Assembly, even without the specter of major legislation. Despite

Busbee's relative disengagement with the issue, a series of quiet efforts led by individual legislators helped reposition planning within the state's administrative bureaucracy, and a series of new laws and modifications to existing laws dealing with environmental regulation, bolstered the state's involvement in regulating the way land would be put to use.

This incremental procession of legislation was kicked off in late 1974, just after the election, when a subcommittee of the state legislature concerned with the state's role in planning and community development (State Planning and Community Affairs Committee) delivered a report that described and analyzed existing planning related activities within various state departments and agencies. Led by Representative Elliott Levitas, the Democrat from Dekalb County who had been instrumental in the passage of Act 5 in 1971 (which created ARC) and the Metropolitan River Protection Act in 1973, the effort was the most ambitious attempt on the part of the legislature to comprehensively evaluate the state's involvement in development planning.⁴⁹ Among the findings of the committee, several stand out.

The Committee's report supported the introduction of legislation in the upcoming 1975 legislative session that would begin the process of identifying geographic areas that were of "critical state concern," which would in turn trigger state scrutiny to assure necessary cooperation across jurisdictional boundaries in order to protect those areas. The report identified a need to refine the state's laws to clarify the legal authority under which local governments could authorize new planned unit developments, which by virtue of their incidence and scale (several large examples had appeared around the edges of metropolitan Atlanta) had been attracting attention at the time. The committee found

that the state's system of area planning and development commissions (ARC being the largest and most prominent) were playing an important role on a number of issues, often being relied upon by small local governments for information and analysis and plan preparation. In response, the committee recommended additional legislation that would allow such commissions to provide more intensive "managing staff services" to the local governments within their jurisdiction. Perhaps the most far reaching task reported on by the Committee was a review of the planning activities allocated, individually, to the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB), the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Department of Transportation (GDOT), the Department of Human Resources (DHR), and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Noting the scope and variation of planning activities undertaken by each agency, many a result of necessary involvement in federal programs, but others the result of confusion and administrative overlap, the Committee focused on planning activities it considered comprehensive, which were largely contained in the DCA and OPB.⁵⁰

The Committee reported that OPB was responsible for a range of activities related to budget planning, long-term capital improvements, and coordination among different state agencies. The DCA was found to be responsible for coordinating community affairs programs and providing guidance on the state's housing needs. The committee also noted that DCA often failed to follow through with its statutory responsibilities, and was in need of extra legislation to ensure that it would follow through with its responsibilities in the future. The committee urged OPB to take a more active role in coordinating and mediating between different state agencies with overlapping services, as well as better support the work of the state's area planning and development commissions. The

committee also suggested a state policy board was needed, which could perhaps be part of DCA, to “bring together key legislative/executive decision-makers in a single structure and have them provide guidance to the State planning process.” The report brought needed attention to what the state’s actual role in development planning was at the time, and shined a light on the existing agencies that showed the most potential for being transformed into instruments for comprehensive planning. With its findings, the Committee enunciated several planning issues that would re-emerge in the next few years and help propel a renewed legislative agenda that would culminate in the Georgia Planning Act.⁵¹

The first ripples from the report were to be seen early in the 1975 legislative session, as a handful of new resolutions and laws were passed that dealt with region-wide and state-level planning. Out of wide-ranging deliberations about the state’s proper role in development planning, especially in the Atlanta area, the legislature passed a resolution directing the committee on State Planning and Community Affairs to begin a comprehensive study of the work of the Atlanta Regional Commission. A corollary committee was formed to study the possibility of creating a single organizational unit to manage metropolitan Atlanta’s freeway system, administratively separate from the Department of Transportation. And an important new environmental law designed to address surface water quality problems stemming from erosion and sediment runoff was passed out of the same session.

The Erosion and Sedimentation Act of 1975, as the law was named, mandated that local governments immediately write and adopt ordinances governing a wide range of land-disturbing activities adjacent to lakes, rivers, and wetlands, aimed at buffering

state waters from flagrantly destructive development practices. Borrowing a page from the Metropolitan River Protection Act, the erosion act directed the creation of a land disturbance permitting system and required anyone proposing a land disturbing activity to submit a plan that detailed how erosion and sediment would be managed at the site level. In cases where local governments chose not to write their own ordinances, the state would assume responsibility for instituting and managing regulations.⁵² The 1975 session also saw the passage of a few amendments to the Metropolitan River Protection Act, changes that encouraged individuals or corporations planning to develop land within the Chattahoochee River Buffer to undergo a pre-review procedure, whereby a proposed development plan would be reviewed by ARC before a formal application for permission to disturb the land was filed in the local jurisdiction. The idea being that an earlier moment of information exchange within the planning process would hopefully lead to greater cooperation between the various parties responsible for managing the region's primary surface water source, and less opportunity for costly confrontations.⁵³ These two legislative actions were important steps on the part of the state's political leadership (however unwitting their intentions may have been) to begin bringing environmental regulation and growth management together.

During the 1976 session, the General Assembly passed two more ideas from the report of the State Planning and Community Affairs Committee, both intended to support the ongoing reconfiguration of the state's role in local and regional planning and its interaction with the local government agencies responsible for implementing land development regulations. To deal with the clutter surrounding the overlapping duties of the Office of Planning and Budget and the Bureau of Community Affairs, Levitas lead

his usual group of metropolitan legislators in pushing through measures that would further consolidate the state's comprehensive planning functions within the offices of the BCA, particularly those policy areas that involved interaction with local governments. Part of this consolidation involved amending Act 1066, which originally laid out the state's role in overseeing local planning efforts (and first established the OPB and BCA), so that future responsibility for "long-range community development planning and research relevant to local governments" would be passed entirely to Community Affairs. Further underscoring the vision for the future BCA, the legislature also voted to move the state housing department, a nominal office created by a 1972 executive order of Jimmy Carter, to the BCA, prescribed a new set of duties for the office, and provided for the appointment of the first, full-time executive director. While moving the housing office to Community Affairs, the state also relocated several other ancillary offices, including the State Building Administrative Board and the Georgia Residential Finance Authority, to support the work of the housing director. The new housing executive director was charged with developing a state housing program, providing technical assistance to local governments, and preparing an annual report on housing in Georgia. By virtue of its expanding palette of duties, BCA was becoming a key node in the state's planning infrastructure.

In 1977, the legislature passed the Georgia Safe Drinking Water Act, which set up a new permitting process for water supply systems that would serve 25 or more people (effectively capturing all withdrawals except those by individual well owners). Designed to work in conjunction with the soil and sedimentation act, the new drinking water law was also a response to amendments to the Federal Clean Water Act and to the need for

more thorough monitoring of the state's water resources.⁵⁴ The 1977 session also saw the passage of the companion Georgia Water Quality Control Act, which required all non-agricultural surface water users withdrawing more than 100,000 gallons of water per day for any purpose to obtain a permit from the Environmental Protection Division. This netted most major industrial users and virtually all municipal systems.⁵⁵ The permitting systems were designed to provide reasonably reliable information about how the state's fresh water was being used and a data source for future water management plans. Finally, in 1978 the legislature revised the state's building codes to require more conservation sensitive water fixtures in new residential construction.

By the end of the 1970s, the state's interest in more tightly controlling its surface water resources was becoming clear, and steps toward making the connection between the overall regulation of local environmental quality and the organization of the bureaucracy responsible for such regulation and enforcement were beginning to be visible. Evidence of the continuing legacy of Carter's administrative reforms could be found in the work of the legislature in the ensuing years. Though individually the new laws were small, they added up. Taken together, the legislative actions in the late 1970s continued to push state interest in the direction of a more encompassing system of land use planning and development management.

Getting Through the General Assembly

By the time the nation was gearing up for the roll out of the 1980 Census, the *Atlanta Journal* was trumpeting the rising power of a suburban legislative faction, one that was expected to distinguish itself as a third power braced against the older rural and

urban factions.⁵⁶ As in-migration keep cranking and the economy rolled along, the state's population continued to grow at a dramatic clip, though the overwhelming majority of this growth remained concentrated in the northern third of the state, particularly in the metropolitan just north of Atlanta counties.⁵⁷

As Jimmy Carter entered what was to be his final year in office, the national recession was taking a huge political toll on his domestic agenda and economic difficulties were trickling all the way down to rapidly growing states like Georgia, which meant federal agencies were forced to retrench policies in the service of reducing spending. The change in tone presented by Reagan during the 1980 election foretold of his efforts to reduce regulatory interference and promote free-market competition in the name of a no-holds-barred economic growth that he and his advisors argued would pull the nation out of its recession. Despite coming from the opposing party, Reagan's ideas found a receptive ear in Governor Busbee and his oft-stated goal of increasing Georgia's economic competitiveness.

Reagan's early attempts to follow up on his campaign promises took a variety forms, some more newsworthy than others. In one of his less known moves, in the middle of 1982 he ordered OMB to rescind Circular A-95, thereby suspending one of the key bases of power in the hands of public regional planning agencies. Later that year, Joe Frank Harris was elected governor of Georgia. While these two events had no direct connection, each portended significant changes that would affect the agencies supporting regional planning in Atlanta. The effective end of the A-95 program meant that the Atlanta Regional Commission would no longer be the sole point of contact between local governments and federal funding programs and new federal programs would likely by-

pass the agency. While ARC maintained its plan review function, local governments could, at least theoretically, more easily ignore the Commission's input and advice during the process of applying for federal money. But Reagan also began scaling back the existing federal infrastructure programs that provided money, pushing them away from building and into managing and maintaining.⁵⁸

As Joe Frank Harris took office in 1983, he was faced with the Reagan administration's loud rhetorical antipathy toward the thrust of existing federal environmental policy and toward maintaining levels of federal involvement in supporting local and regional planning activities. While himself a conservative legislator from a small north Georgia town, Harris had cut his political teeth during the early 1970s and Jimmy Carter's gubernatorial term, bearing witness to Carter's style and deeply influenced by Carter's aggressive attempts to reform state government and develop an expanded role for the state in local planning and development. Harris' interest in the environment remained mostly quiet during his first term, but by the middle of 1984 (just after the end of the state's legislative session), a few initiatives were underway that indicated that the state's interest in planning may have receded from view, but had not waned, and would expand dramatically in a few years (helped along by ARC and the relentless growth of metro Atlanta).

After the flurry of activity in the middle of the 1970s, a lull that lasted into the first few years of the 1980s had seen the state's environmental movement (if it could be properly called a 'movement') slow its progress, at least in terms of the introduction of significant new legislation. Yet in the background, support for expanding the scope of the state's control over development continued to evolve among certain key officials and

organizations (notably the ARC and its allies), setting up conditions that would lead to another round of new planning regulations in the late 1980s. The continuing transformation of the metropolitan landscape, buildings, infrastructure, demographics, and economy helped create an environment favorable to additional planning regulation.

Upon the public release of a rather extended economic and demographic profile of metro Atlanta in late 1983, ARC noted several issues that had already affected the region and several issues on the horizon. The urbanized extent of the metropolitan region had expanded significantly since 1970. During that decade, the most rapid growth had occurred in the unincorporated sections of counties surrounding the central city, helped along by a 1972 state law that permitted counties to provide a full range of urban services (more or less equivalent to cities). The state had also recently passed legislation allowed counties to impose, by referendum, limited term sales tax increases to fund internal infrastructure projects, as well as a law that opened the door for tax increment financing districts.

Expansions in the reach of water and sewer systems supported by Clean Water Act funds, particularly in the major northern suburbs (Cobb, Gwinnett, North Fulton), provided some of the infrastructure critical to growth. The first segments of Atlanta's regional rapid rail system had opened, though the bulk of the track was still under construction. A major freeway reconstruction project had expanded the capacity of the portions of the Interstate system within the perimeter highway. And all the while, ARC was in the process of updating the regional development plan, which supported a vigorous conversation about the future of the region. But looking into the future, the report noted that federal support for transportation and environmental planning within the

Reagan Administration had been successfully tweaked to emphasize market solutions to government responsibilities, which meant creatively managing existing infrastructure capacity rather than building anew would be the order of the day.⁵⁹

Against this background, partly a result of it, in 1984 ARC's governing board, at the advice of the planning staff, voted to establish a formal regional development notification system. With a literal sounding name (Major Development Area Plan Reviews), the notification system could be seen as simply an extension of the area plan review function set up when the commission was created. In some respects it was, but in the folds of its design the notification system was an important expansive of the existing program. The system was designed to kick in when ARC received notice that a major development had been proposed to a local government within the region. Commission planners, as part of their review process, would then notify affected local governments and state agencies, share critical documentation of the proposed project, and give potentially affected governments an opportunity to review and raise issue with the project (or signal their approval).⁶⁰ As information from affected parties came forth, ARC could arrange and coordinate conversation about the project as well as suggest changes or alterations to the proposal. Though created to manage the flow of information concerning the cross-jurisdictional impact presented by large-scale developments (buildings and infrastructure and the like), the plan reviews were also another step in the direction of the kind of comprehensive planning process Carter had imagined in the early 1970s. The early-warning system became a critical node in the continuing development of the state's planning policies, one of the points through which ARC's work would influence the direction the state would take.⁶¹

When the new Regional Development Plan was published in 1985, it crystallized attempts by the planning staff to grapple with the legacy of the 1975 plan, and revisited more than a few of the same issues. Like the 1975 plan, the policies, analyses, and discourse of the updated RDP emanated from a set of population, employment, and land use projections produced by a large-scale urban forecasting model.⁶² Yet the planners at ARC had come to recognize many of the problems associated with the projections and the policies from the first time around (including the complaints that had been voiced back in 1975 when the plan was being written), which tinted the RDP update process with a sense of dissonance. Increasingly evident was the first plan's mixed legacy in terms of the growth that had been predicted and the growth that had actually happened.⁶³ The update attempted to reflect some recent changes in ARC's capacity (major development reviews) and its context (declining federal support). Yet the update process also presented an opportunity to speak to larger structural issues framing those problems (issues that were less palatable before).

The most significant of those issues to emerge was the idea of spreading mandatory county-level land use plans across the state, though this time the idea found support from several different sources simultaneously (and found a sympathetic ear in Joe Frank Harris). A relatively severe drought that lasted through the early-mid 1980s, helped push the issue of water resource management into the public eye. The Atlanta Water Resource Study finally trailed off in the early 1980s. Several high profile court cases involving land use were decided that called into question the legal standing of existing development regulations of several local governments. And in early 1985 the state of Florida passed a major piece of its growing collection of land use laws.⁶⁴ By the

end of 1985, even the long-time (and notoriously conservative) director of the Georgia's Department of Natural Resources had begun to publicly mention the need for mandatory land use plans for all counties in the state, a sure signal of the seriousness of the idea.⁶⁵

The early shreds of the conversation regarding a future of much tighter regulation of land use treaded gently around the details of how the state's involvement might be structured (and how far it would reach), out of fear of raising the ire of rural legislators whose support would ultimately be necessary to secure the passage of any major bill. Yet an increasing number of metro Atlanta legislators recognized the limited ability of the region's political units to independently deal with the spill over effects of the rapid and sustained growth that had become de rigueur. And ARC's research agenda continued to expound upon and publicize land use management practices in Florida and Minnesota, the two states perceived as being the most politically similar to Georgia. From 1985 to 1987, through the course of retreats, working sessions, reports, and conferences on the prevailing conditions in the region that included a number of major players in state politics, ideas about the what the near future of land use planning should look like began to emerge more clearly.⁶⁶

In 1986, Joe Frank Harris easily won a second term in the governor's mansion. Among the promises he made during the campaign season, the biggest was the pledge to establish a special commission (later named the Quality Growth Commission) to be charged with devising a strategy for expanding and strengthening the state's role in local comprehensive planning. True to his word, the commission that Harris put together made its public debut in the early summer of 1987. Membership included a number of metropolitan legislators, business people, local elected officials, and non-profit directors.

A well-regarded Atlanta environmentalist, John Sibley, was appointed executive director of the staff function of the commission. One of Harris's closet political allies, Atlanta planner/developer Joel Cowan, served as chairman of the appointed board, and several members of the commission also sat on the ARC Board. It was, in most respects, a collection of individuals who were supporters or friends of Harris, but membership tilted heavily toward Atlanta (where development issues were felt most intensely) and the commission was headed by an individual with a reputation for being thoughtful and far-sighted.⁶⁷

During the formal swearing in ceremony of the QGC, Harris declared that the work of the group would “determine the means to continue our economic development, [and] to balance that development with wise management of natural, physical, and financial resources.” Harris promised his utmost support for the commission, and by including several seasoned legislators who he could trust to usher any resulting legislation through the General Assembly, he increased the likelihood that the commission's recommendations would actually see the light of day. Two of those legislators were expected to become contenders for the governorship sometime in the next decade or so. One, Johnny Isakson, ended up being elected to the US Senate, and the other, Roy Barnes, was indeed elected Governor twelve years later. Given eighteen months to come up with a report and a few concrete recommendations, the commission operated on a relatively tight time frame. By the time the recommendations were expected be published, Harris would have only two legislative sessions to get any resulting bills written, introduced, and passed. To deal with the time constraint, the Governor attempted to appoint members he believed could get along and likely would be

able to arrive at broad agreement on a set of recommendations. He also encouraged the commission to adopt a mode of operating based around conflict resolution and consensus building. This decision was driven by the need to come up with “practical, do-able steps the state can take,” which was another way of saying that the commission would train its focus on modest and flexible strategies that could find fairly wide support in the state legislature. And using a consensus-oriented technique would hopefully avoid bogging the report down in an impasse or a nasty public fight over its validity, or even worse, a fundamental dispute about the constitutionality of planning at all.⁶⁸ This strategy was possible only because many of the recommendations had been studied and researched beforehand, and most were ideas that had already been developed, and in some cases tested, by ARC within metro Atlanta.

Since ARC’s founding in 1971, the agency had maintained a steadily expanding research program. Gathering and organizing information on an array of issues (demographic, economic, transportation, land use, among others), ARC’s research had led to a number of planning policies being tested and implemented in the counties within its jurisdiction. Aside from the ideas that made it to the policy stage were a number of other topics that were enunciated, researched, and discussed, but not immediately adopted. These included investigations of regional zoning authority, establishing a regional tax, lessons from implementation of growth management in other states, and the impact of court decisions on planning activities. Together, the policies and background research formed a substantial body of knowledge and rich ground for cultivating new policies, some of which were reflected in the recommendations in the final QGC report.

After holding 19 separate public hearings and almost countless internal meetings to discuss and preview ideas being considered for inclusion in the report, the final draft of the Quality Growth Commission report was published at the end of 1988 to quite a bit of publicity, not all positive. Acknowledging the sensitive political context into which any new state regulations would be thrust, the report reflexively acknowledged the importance of property rights and maintaining a business-friendly climate. Starting with two rather broad goals, to “accommodate the inevitable growth of the future without allowing a deterioration in the qualities of life” and to “upgrade the quality of life in low-growth areas through realistic and innovative economic development programs,” the commission offered a handful of specific recommendations. Though they spanned several substantive areas, including land use, transportation, water, and waste, the primary focus was on the process and organization of local planning activities and the state’s relationship to those activities. Recommendations included expanding the state’s system of rural four-lane highways to improve connections between less developed regions, increasing funding for local infrastructure development, and permitting local governments to institute development impact fees. But the recommendations with the biggest potential impact included developing a system of regional reservoirs in North Georgia, establishing a cabinet level Development Council, significantly expanding the work program and funding of the state’s area planning commissions, requiring local plans to be reviewed by a corresponding regional planning commission, and requiring all counties to write and adopt a comprehensive development plan every ten years.⁶⁹

Upon publication, questions about the report were immediately raised, particularly about how the governor would orchestrate the process of transforming ideas

into laws. A number of observers argued that by adopting a consensus approach, Harris had given up the fight with rural legislators even before it had begun. Harris was often accused of “pull[ing] the teeth from his own program,” a critique based on the expectation that he would soften the penalties the state would mete out to local governments that refused to comply with elements of any forthcoming planning legislation. The fact that the commission had stopped short of requiring all counties to adopt a formal zoning ordinance fell on Harris as a shortfall.⁷⁰ But most of the recommendations of the committee were widely hailed in the Atlanta media. Front and center was the new mandate that local governments would be required to write plans and submit them to regional agencies for review and approval. This struck many observers as an essential step in ensuring the state’s future growth would be orderly and as an important part of modernizing planning laws. Because of long-standing water supply issues, the suggestion that the state should build a system of reservoirs was welcomed as a necessary hedge against an uncertain future. Because so much of the report focused on issues important to north Georgia, metro Atlanta especially, the recommendations served to reiterate the region’s political dominance in state wide affairs. The commission report scored a major point in the battle to slowly expand the state’s authority over its natural resources and reign in local governments.

At the start of the 1989 legislative session, Governor Harris officially presented the recommendations of the Quality Growth Commission to the members of the General Assembly in his State of the State address. Describing the proposed growth strategies as “a new way of thinking about old problems,” Harris noted that the “carrot and stick approach is attractive and usually successful,” a nod to his understanding of the need to

maintain a precious balance between home rule and state authority that everyone involved in the process recognized would be necessary for any significant new legislation to survive the General Assembly intact. In the speech, the Governor outlined four separate pieces of legislation that he would introduce to the Assembly in the coming session. The proposed legislation included a new water supply act to begin the process of acquiring sites for regional water reservoirs that would serve the rapidly growing counties of North Georgia, amendments to the 1975 Erosion and Sedimentation Act, a new program to provide state-backed loans to local governments to build new solid waste facilities, and the main event, a multi-faceted bill that would mandate local comprehensive plans, renovate and expand the activities of the Bureau of Community Affairs, and reforming the existing system of regional planning agencies across the state. To support this legislation, the Governor requested \$31 million in additional state funds. This collection of bills formed the crux of Harris's legislative agenda for the year.⁷¹

As the recommendations of the Quality Growth Commission began to appear as bills in the first days of the Assembly session, the potential for failure ran high. Georgia's legislature had seen its share of tumult, and in many respects was still in the throes of a transformation from a body dominated by rural representatives to one dominated by metropolitan Atlanta. Rural legislators still held a number of committee chairmanships and wielded considerable sway among their colleagues. Because of lingering rural resentment of Atlanta's growing political power, many observers expected growth management legislation, widely perceived as an Atlanta issue, to fail.

Into this fray came the largest single piece of legislation, which began life as House Bill 215, which set up the basic framework requiring local governments to adopt

plans for managing development. Companion bills included Senate Bill 84, which strengthened the state's existing soil erosion law, Senate Bill 86, which directed DNR to begin planning a system of regional water reservoirs, and House Bill 102, which provided state assistance (technical and financial) to local governments for planning and building new solid waste disposal sites.

In spite of their aggressive reach, certainly unprecedented in Georgia, the bills generated surprisingly little controversy among the rank and file of the General Assembly.⁷² Though the main comprehensive planning bill would likely affect rural areas disproportionately, the majority of city and county officials appeared to accept the basic tenets of the legislation. The powerful knee jerk reaction expected from rural legislators barely peeped. The legislators involved in the QGC process attributed this in part to the pre-session work members of the commission had put in, befriending potential enemies of the recommendations before they were released, smartly diffusing most potential roadblocks before they had a chance to derail the entire process. But part of the acquiescence also stemmed from the fact that the Governor's bill did not require constitutional amendments, and used a system of financial carrots to encourage governments to participate rather than penalties against them for failing to do so. As a result, in a conservative region where maintaining local control of land use decisions could trump virtually any move by the state to do otherwise, the land use bill was perceived as leaving local governments alone. As one representative put it, "it's strictly up to the local governments. They don't have to do it if they don't want to; they'll just lose a little state money if they don't." Yet, despite the apparent voluntary character of the legislation, the likelihood that it would lead to new land use restrictions in areas

where there had been none ran high. Zoning remained the cheapest, easiest and most thoroughly tested available tool for managing land use, and was likely to be one of the first tools local governments would adopt. Regarding the planning bill, and the chain of dominoes likely to fall as a result of its passage, the same rural legislator quipped in an interview with a reporter from the *Journal-Constitution*, “I think everybody realizes we need it.”⁷³

Nevertheless, the first version of HB 215 faced enough opposition in the legislature that a few concessions were unavoidable. The most notable point of compromise involved the power of the General Assembly to get directly involved in the writing of the detailed regulations that would come after the bill had passed into law. The QGC had recommended that the state Bureau of Community Affairs (to be renamed as a Department) should be responsible for writing the minimum standards that local plans would have to meet in order to be considered compliant. Opposition to giving DCA staff such authority emerged among a handful of rural legislators in the House of Representatives, and a compromise had to be struck that would give the legislature a hand in setting those standards in order to avoid defeat. By the time the bill emerged from the Senate the initial compromise had been scaled back, giving certain legislative subcommittees only power to approve (or reject) the minimum standards in total, but not to tangle with their content or suggest revisions.⁷⁴ Yet this compromise must be considered minor, especially in a legislative session that also saw the passage of several other new environmental regulations and a sales tax increase to fund the new planning law.⁷⁵

To their credit, Harris and the QGC seemed to understand the sentiment of their opponents much better than their opponents understood the breadth of the planning bills. Taking a broad and incremental approach to the process of writing and passing land use legislation afforded them relatively wide latitude in terms of how the specific features of the laws would be implemented. Even on the eve of the final vote on the main planning bill, the extent of the law's impact on land development practices remained unknown to the legislators that were voting on it. Though everyone realized that passage of the act meant that cities and counties would be responsible for producing and adopting comprehensive development plans, on paper the penalties for failing to do so appeared to be limited to losing certain state funds. Different state departments would be permitted to withhold funds, though the law did not require withholding or specify which funds might be subject (or the extent). The DCA was charged with the task of fleshing out the internal structure of the act, but this was not predicted to be finished for at least twelve more months, long after the act would receive the Governor's signature. Even the legal status of the act remained mysterious during the vote, as some legislators said they expected affected communities to challenge the constitutionality of the regulations. And a few lawmakers still clung to the belief that the new law would turn out to be zoning in disguise.⁷⁶

The vote in the General Assembly in favor of the bill belied any lingering opposition. In addition to the land use bill, the three companion bills also easily passed on to the Governor for his signature. With these votes, a dramatic expansion of state authority over the local planning process was put into action.

In its final version, running nearly 100 pages, Act 634, also known as the State-Wide Planning and Development Act, or the Georgia Planning Act (unofficial), accomplished much of what the Governor and the QGC had intended, erecting a program that would strongly encourage local governments to embrace the idea of comprehensive planning. In five separate but related parts, the Act established a prescribed program for mandatory state-wide planning and development, created the Governor's Development Council, and forged new, concrete connections between the Department of Community Affairs and Department of Natural Resources.

Part one of the act established the Governor's Development Council, which was to be a permanent executive branch body comprised of the commissioners of the major administrative divisions of the state along with a few extra members appointed by the Governor. Meetings of the council would occur at least once a month. The Council was charged with supervising and reviewing the long-range planning efforts of state agencies, particularly the design and construction of public facilities.⁷⁷ The Council would help the different fragments of the public bureaucracy learn to work together plotting the state's future.

Part two redefined the responsibilities and powers of the revised Department of Community Affairs. In its new guise, DCA would serve as the primary liaison between local governments and the state, function as the state's principal agency for managing comprehensive development planning, and provide general technical assistance to local governments. The act also set parameters for membership on the Board of Community Affairs, responsibilities of the Board, and responsibilities for the commissioner of the department.

Part two also stipulated details of the kinds of planning activities for which DCA would be responsible. Among other things, this included providing planning assistance to local governments, organizing a database of land information, devising a rural economic development plan, maintaining a program of research on planning, development, and government affairs, and staff support for the Governor's office in developing a comprehensive plan for the state. The two most important of these activities, the crux of the carrot and stick, were developing the minimum standards against which local comprehensive plans would be evaluated and the authority to grant funds to local governments for development related projects based on those evaluations. DCA was also directed to prepare regulations for protecting natural resource and vital areas identified by DNR, as well as update the standards for determining developments of regional impact.

If local governments produce plans that meet DCA minimum standards, they would be designated 'qualified local governments,' which would allow those governments to apply for grants to fund infrastructure and support economic development activities. The local plans were expected to analyze housing, land use (existing and future), transportation, human services, natural resources, historic resources, infrastructure, vital areas, economy, and recreation facilities, in addition to any other substantive topics deemed necessary or useful. Every county, and every city with a population over 2,500, would be required to develop a comprehensive development plan. Updates to local plans would proceed according to schedules established as part of the minimum standards.⁷⁸ In practice, the clarity of the minimum standards system would go

a long way in defining the character and quality of local plans, which would in turn help determine how effective the state's effort at growth management would be later judged.

Part three of the Act established a system of regional development centers across the state, succeeding the area planning and development commissions that had been in existence for almost twenty years.⁷⁹ The new regional development centers were intended to be intermediaries between local governments and the state, much like before. As such, every county and municipality was assigned to an RDC and required to pay annual membership fees to support its work (which supplemented state funds). But unlike before, the RDC's were designed to be more engaged in local planning issues. The concrete tasks set forth for the RDC's included adopting regional plans, providing information to the state database, assisting local governments with plan preparation, and serving as liaisons with adjacent governments. But here too, the most important function had to do with the implementation of the minimum planning standards for local comprehensive plans. The DCA strategy for monitoring local comprehensive planning would be constructed on top of the regional development commissions, which meant that RDC's would be the front line, responsible for reviewing and commenting on local comprehensive plans, comparing them against the state's minimum standards, and rendering judgment on a plan's quality. In essence, the RDC's would operate as miniature versions of the Atlanta Regional Commission, though this could hardly be called mere happenstance.⁸⁰

Part four of the Act actually authorized counties and municipalities to write and adopt comprehensive plans, capital improvements plans, and regulations appropriate to carrying out the policies in the comprehensive plan. It also directed all counties and

municipalities to be assigned to an appropriate regional development center, pay dues to said center, and participate in the effort to develop a state land development database.⁸¹

Part five of the Act outlined the role of the Department of Natural Resources in the comprehensive planning process. In effect, the law required that DNR develop its own set of minimum standards to protect the sources of the public water supply. These standards included buffers around rivers, streams, and wetlands, and land development density stipulations for lands that abut or otherwise impact the quality of surface and ground water resources. The law did not dictate particular numeric standards for buffers or land density, but left those decisions to DNR staff, similar to how the details of the minimum planning standards were left to DCA figure out.⁸²

Part six tied up odds and ends resulting from the changes in state code wrought by the Act, correcting conflicts with existing legislation, clarifying and strengthening procedures for reviewing development proposals on lands covered by the Metropolitan River Protection Act, and setting up a few new requirements related to rural economic development and the modernization (digitization) of local land records.⁸³

Each of the companion bills offered a complimentary wrinkle to the state's attempts to exercise more control over land development. To a great extent the major QGC recommendations, certainly the ones that received the most attention, reflected ideas that could be traced to an origin somewhere within ARC's seventeen year long program of research and practice. A plan for creating a system of regional reservoirs (in conjunction with an additional dam on the Chattahoochee River) in metro Atlanta had been a topic of discussion for years, outlined in detail in ARC's 1978 Water Supply Plan and included in both the 1975 and 1985 Regional Development Plans. Since its

inception, member counties had been required to subsidize ARC based on population, and the state had provided an annual contribution, which supplemented the money the commission received from the federal government. In fact, money had been an important factor in ARC's stability and ability to carry out the kind of far-reaching, multi-faceted research and planning exercises envisioned by the Quality Growth Commission for the rest of the state (which the QGC seemed to realize). One of ARC's long-time activities included reviewing and commenting on the relative merits of local plans cities and counties within its jurisdiction prepared, comparing those plans against the most up to date Regional Development Plan. As administrator of the A-95 review program, the Commission also was responsible for reviewing local government applications for federal financial assistance, providing comments to the granting agency on the quality of the application and its relationship to the activities of other governments in the region.

Before the QGC recommendations were published, Georgia had no law mandating local comprehensive plans. While the authority to write plans and adopt zoning had been established by the state in the 1950s, by the late 1980s, only about 30% of Georgia's cities and counties actually had plans, and about the same percent had adopted zoning ordinances. The story was quite different in metro Atlanta, where by the early 1970s 80% of the cities and counties within ARC's jurisdiction had both plans and zoning ordinances in place, most of which were updated on a relatively consistent basis (though not on consistent schedules). That so many metro area governments had plans and ordinances in part could be attributed to size: population, budget, bureaucratic staff. But the work of ARC (and its predecessor agencies) played an equally important hand, which the new planning act intended to bring to the rest of the state. For the first twelve

years ARC existed, it had provided a steadily expanding variety of services to its member governments in support of comprehensive planning and zoning. The stream of population and employment projections, catalogs of development patterns, and research reports provided critical background information, presented and distributed to encourage local governments to adopt and implement steadily more aggressive planning regulations. But ARC's research reports and model policies offered more than off-the-shelf information. They were also accompanied by various support services that included direct staff supervision of the preparation of comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances. And the Commission's training sessions for elected officials and staff helped cement the channels of information flow.

The Georgia Water Supply Act, signed into law in 1989 along with the planning act, authorized the state's Department of Natural Resources to begin the process of designing and constructing a system of new reservoirs in north Georgia, specifically to deal with anticipated water supply problems. More specifically, the act granted DNR power to purchase (or otherwise obtain the rights to) real property for the purpose of building reservoirs and gave the agency leeway to write its own rules and regulations governing the selection of particular sites and how the facilities would be managed over time.⁸⁴ The Solid Waste Management Act, signed at the same time, required any landowner in a large county (over 350,000 population) contemplating constructing a solid waste disposal facility within two miles of an adjoining county to seek approval from the government of the neighboring county, thereby triggering a process of cross jurisdictional cooperation.⁸⁵ Amendments to the 1975 Erosion and Sedimentation Act refined parts of the original act and set up stricter regulations on land disturbing activities adjacent to

state waters. With the amendments, an undisturbed vegetative buffer of 25 feet was required along all the banks of all state waters, land disturbing activities were relegated to 100 feet from stream banks, and storm-water discharges from disturbed areas had to be controlled to minimize turbidity (a measure of the relative amount of suspended solid particles in a sample of water). The changes further bulked up the requirements for issuing land disturbing permit applications, taking into account the applicant's past record of compliance, and extended DNR's powers of enforcement, allowing the Department to pursue violations of provisions contained in a permit long after its issue.⁸⁶

Implementing the planning policies contained in the new acts was perceived at the time as a potential struggle. Only a few years prior, Florida had begun its own process of implementing growth management legislation, which had been passed into law in 1985, and media reports about the twists in that process were not entirely encouraging. Florida's law, a bundle of regulations much like Georgia's, required every county to adopt a comprehensive plan and to identify critical environmental resources that deserved extra protection.⁸⁷ But Florida's law allowed little room for negotiation between the state and local governments, having laid the burden of proof on local doorsteps to demonstrate with their plans that adequate infrastructure (roads, water supply) would exist prior to new development being approved. Yet in spite of the lack of much room for argument, resistance among local governments had been strong. Half of the local comprehensive plans submitted to the state's Department of Community Affairs were initially rejected as inadequate and in need of significant revision. But by 1989, by all appearances Florida's growth management laws were beginning to take hold, as local governments got used to the process and the changes to the decision making framework the laws required.⁸⁸

In some ways, Georgia's road to implementing its new land use laws faced fewer ostensible roadblocks. Local governments had more standing in the process, more authority to negotiate with the state, and thereby more perceived control over how the laws would work on the ground. The state presented its role as less commanding, at least on the surface. Because of the carrot/stick structure of the laws, negotiation and consensus, rather than punishment, would be the preferred strategy for ensuring compliance. If a local government failed to produce an adequate plan, it would become ineligible for certain state funds, but likely would not be taken to court or dragged before an executive committee to explain its behavior. That the minimum standards had not been published by the time the bill was voted in the legislature seemed to point toward a level of flexibility in the implementation process, as did the assurance that the General Assembly would be able to vote to accept the minimum standards once they were published, though without the authority to change them. The soft quality of Georgia's regulations cleared a path for legislative approval that might otherwise have been blocked.

Growing State Control

Together, the collection of planning-related acts put into place during the 1989 legislative session offered a significant step toward more oversight of the processes of land development. But the push for growth management legislation did not come out of the blue. In many respects, the fruition of Georgia's growth management laws was the culmination of a long-running effort to increase the authority and scope of the state's control over local governments, a recognition of the manifold problems associated with

unchecked home rule and its interference with orderly economic growth. This knowledge emerged from several different sources simultaneously. Rising national consciousness of the fragility of the natural environment, changes in intergovernmental relations, modernization and reform of state government, and the ongoing urbanization of the population all contributed to the concern about the way land should or should not be developed.

Against this broad backdrop, the timing of the state of Georgia's interest in land use planning must be understood in the more immediate context of the experience of rapid urbanization in metropolitan Atlanta, and the region's central role in the state's economy and politics. By the mid-1980s, Atlanta had been experiencing sustained population and economic growth for the better part of 30 years. The influx of people and jobs brought both pressure and opportunity for new development. Housing, offices, stores, and all the accoutrements both necessary to support growth and help propel growth spread outward from the urban core like a ripple, turning small towns, farms, and forests into subdivisions, strip malls, and office parks: a vast low-density urban carpet. For many places swept into the regional fold, the notion of doing local planning, or managing what individuals do with their private land, became a necessary but confusing evil, one about which most local governments knew little. Yet the side effects of not taking planning seriously were increasingly obvious to almost everyone on the inside. The rest of the country would also soon sit up and take notice.

Yet amid this confusion, Atlanta had long hosted an active public discourse about regionalism, one that centered around a project of extending the reach of planning to places where it had little history. Since 1971 this discourse had been revealed in the

work of the Atlanta Regional Commission, which played an important role as a demonstration site for new planning policies as well as an information broker. As the march of urbanization stretched deeper into the north Georgia countryside, ARC's role became more complex. New state laws steadily supported the work of the Commission, in spite of periodic attempts to undercut it. Through a variety of often overlapping channels, the Commission provided data, training, technical services, and advice to local governments within its jurisdiction, all part of a strategy to encourage a higher level of planning consciousness. But at its heart, this effort remained incremental. The steps to devising and implementing particular policies took time, and policies needed to appear flexible in order to win sufficient political support. Georgia's often conservative rural politics, coupled with a state supreme court that tended to read the rights of the individual property owner as sacrosanct, meant that major regulatory changes could only come about slowly.

Lifting a page from ARC's two decades of experience dealing with local governments in metro Atlanta, the incrementalism built into Georgia's state-wide planning legislation should be measured by its clear-eyed understanding of the political situation, as much as for its timidity. A good example of this was DCA's delay in writing and publishing minimum planning standards until well after the enabling legislation was passed. At first, the delay in publishing minimum standards looked like a concession to the rural legislators who seemed dead-set against any kind of mandatory planning law. But upon second glance it becomes obvious how the delay actually gave the agency and those in favor of stronger planning rules additional leverage, providing a cooling off period and letting the bureaucracy do its work in peace.

In effect, the growth of ARC (and parallel organizations in other regions), out of the combined effort of local, state, and federal governments, was the first step in a long-term process of coupling economic growth to planned development. Beginning in the minds of the first cadre of post-war metropolitan planners, officials, and businessmen, the value of planning and regional coordination was recognized early on for the predictability it could produce for investors, property owners, and businesses. While the idea of regional planning found traction in its economic promise, its role evolved into a key tool in addressing serious environmental issues. While the idea was hatched and nurtured in Atlanta in the early post-war years, with time and maturation it was eventually rolled out to the rest of the state. Following the wave of urbanization that moved from the central city outward, and the accompanying transformation of the state's political leadership, in effect the passage of the Georgia Planning Act in 1989 symbolized the extent that the influence of metropolitan Atlanta had finally reached: the entire state was now under its sway.

The question as to why growth management would happen in Georgia, a place long perceived as conservative, pro-development, anti-environment, before it did in many ostensibly more planning friendly places in the U.S., brooks no simple answer. Maybe Georgia's growth management laws were the product of the imprint Jimmy Carter left through his gubernatorial term. Maybe Georgia's laws were actually meant to be hollow, a nod to responsible planning to appease a few vocal factions only to be ignored in the aftermath. Or maybe Georgia's handful of progressives found a model process for developing and implementing planning regulations within a political environment otherwise hostile to growth regulations.

Putting these pieces together in the context of Georgia's political scene in the 1970s, despite what has been suggested in other places, indicates that the state harbored a surprisingly progressive stance toward planning as a process. No one would suggest that the urban landscape that had taken shape by 1990 was a model of compact urban development. But by elevating planning to a position of importance within the state bureaucracy, the state had obviously invested in local, regional, and state planning as public institutions.

If the early political careers of two influential state legislators who were members of the Quality Growth Commission, Roy Barnes and Johnny Isakson, are any indication, Georgia's growth management laws were the result of a long-term investment in public planning, one with surprisingly broad consensus. Both products of Cobb County, the differences between them in some ways were merely a result of party affiliation.⁸⁹ Barnes emerged from the state's old democratic party, from a faction that had made strides in moving past its roots as the party of massive resistance to desegregation. Isakson identified himself with a centrist faction of the state's republicans, a businessman's version of the party that emphasized economic expansion and professionalizing government. Barnes and Isakson worked together in the legislature to get the QGC's recommendations through the necessary committees in tact. Both were outspoken in their support of mandatory comprehensive planning. Barnes and Isakson, perhaps more than any other state politicians of their generation, represent the strange dichotomy of Georgia's land development politics in the years after 1970: agreement just below the surface that belies what otherwise appear to be fundamental disputes.

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- ¹ Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>
- ² Ronald Reagan, "Executive Order 12372," July 14, 1982, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>
- ³ For an introductory discussion of Reagan's impact on the national political climate, Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: the Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: de Capo, 2002) and Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser, "Introduction," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Fraser and Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- ⁴ For a long format discussion of the Interstate Highway system, see Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For a DOT insider's account of federal transportation policy, see Edward Weiner, *Urban Transportation Planning in the United States: An Historical Overview*, (Washington, D.C., 1997).
- ⁵ See Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias* (New York: Basic, 1987)
- ⁶ For details about the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act and the A-95 program, see Office of Management and Budget, *Circular No. A-95: What It Is – How It Works*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office (1976).
- ⁷ Along with significant funds for infrastructure building, the 1972 Federal Water Pollution Control Amendments (Clean Water Act) designated regional water planning agencies, and required jurisdictions applying for funds to do A-95 coordination through these agencies. See *Federal Water Pollution Control Act*, Section 205, 1972.
- ⁸ See Weiner, (1997), p56-62.
- ⁹ "National Land Use Policy: Background Paper on Past and Pending Legislation and the Roles of the Executive Branch, Congress, and the States in Land Use Policy and Planning," Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, United States Senate, April 1972
- ¹⁰ See Rome, *The Bulldozer In the Countryside*, Chapter 6, for a longer discussion of the environmental movement and local planning.
- ¹¹ For a discussion of the development of Oregon's growth management law as it applied to Portland specifically, see Carl Abbott, *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). For a short discussion of the implementation of Oregon's growth management legislation, see Donald Chance, "A Behavioral Theory of Planning," (PhD Dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2007), Chapter 1.
- ¹² Carter's major public mention of a commission for planning came during the 1974 State of the State address. See Jimmy Carter, "State of the State Address, January 14, 1974," *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, 1974.
- ¹³ Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *Urban America and the Federal System*, M-47, Washington (1969); *Building Codes: a Program For Intergovernmental Reform*, A-28, Washington (1966); *Metropolitan Social and Economic Disparities: Implications for Intergovernmental Relations in Central Cities and Suburbs*, A-25, Washington (1966)
- ¹⁴ *Ninth Annual Report*, January 1968, Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations Washington, DC, page 1
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, page 11; "Circular No. A-95: What it is, how it works," Office of Management and Budget, July 1, 1976, page 5
- ¹⁶ The Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 represented a significant piece of legislation in terms of fostering public metropolitan planning agencies. The legislation

was supplemented by OMB Circular A-80 and A-82, which implemented the grant application review process required by the Model Cities Act. See Jerome Stem and J. Norman Reid, *Federal Programs Supporting Multicounty Substate Regional Activities: An Overview*, US Department of Agriculture Rural Development Research Report No. 23 (1980).

¹⁷ Stam and Reid, 1980, p23-24.

¹⁸ “Circular No. A-95: What it is, how it works,” pages 5-8.

¹⁹ Between 1973 and 1979, the ACIR produced no less than fourteen policy reports that included a discussion of the A-95 program.

²⁰ ARCC, “Working Session,” July 24, 1985

²¹ Stam and Reid, 1980, p5, 43

²² Stam and Reid, 1980, p42

²³ For a detailed overview of some of the problems associated with the regulations affecting the physical condition of U.S. cities in the 1960s, see *Building the American City: Report of the National Commission on Urban Problems*, National Commission on Urban Problems (New York: Praeger Press, 1969); *Kerner Commission, Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968).

²⁴ “National Land Use Policy,” 1972, p1

²⁵ For a discussion of the legacy of the Regional Planning Association and the New Deal, see Carl Sussman, *Planning the Fourth Migration: the Neglected Vision of the Regional Planning Association of America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).

²⁶ The American Law Institute’s Model State Land Development Code, authored by Richard Babcock, was published in 1975. The code advocated was one of the primary background papers in the land use policy debates. For details, see American Law Institute, *A Model Land Development Code* (Washington: American Bar Association, 1975).

²⁷ For a sample of the debate in the national media, see “Planning the Second America,” Editorial, *Washington Post*, November 20, 1971; Russell Train, “On the States Role in ‘Planning the Second America,’” Letter to the Editor, *Washington Post*, December 15, 1971; Henry Jackson, “Senator Jackson on the Bill for a Land Use Policy,” Letter to the Editor, *Washington Post*, December 28, 1971; Rogers Morton, “Secretary of the Interior on the Land Use Policy,” Letter to the Editor, *Washington Post*, January 4, 1972. The journal *Science* covered the debates fairly extensively, contextualizing them as part of a broader conversation about federal environmental policy. See Luther Carter, “Land Use: Congress Taking Up Conflict Over Power Plants,” *Science*, Volume 170, Number 3959 (1970); Carter, “Land Use Law: Congress on Verge of Modest Beginning,” *Science* 182, no. 4113 (1973).

²⁸ For an overview of the bills and the debates in the Senate, see Jayne Daly, “A Glimpse of the Past - A Vision of the Future: Senator Henry M. Jackson and National Land Use Legislation,” *Urban Law* 28, no. 7 (1996); 91st Congress, Senate Bill 3354, 1970; 92nd Congress, Senate Bill 632, 1971; 92nd Congress, Senate Bill 992, 1971.

²⁹ See Schulman, *The Seventies*, Chapter 5 and Daly, “A Glimpse of the Past - A Vision of the Future: Senator Henry M. Jackson and National Land Use Legislation.”

³⁰ Ronald Reagan, “Executive Order 12372,” July 14, 1982, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>.

³¹ Schulman, *The Seventies*, Chapter 9

³² For a brief overview and very cursory comparison of the programs, see Dennis Gale, “Eight State-Sponsored Growth Management Programs,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 58, no. 4 (1992). The literature on growth management is voluminous but narrow in perspective, having thus far been largely concerned with finding measures of its effectiveness and offering suggestions for improvements while showing little appreciation for the forces that fostered

growth management in the first place. For an example of this scholarship, see Arthur Nelson and Casey Dawkins, "Urban Containment in the United States: History, Models, and Techniques for Regional and Metropolitan Growth Management," *Planning Advisory Service Report #520*, (Chicago: American Planning Association, 2005); Arthur Nelson and J.B. Duncan, *Growth Management Principles and Practices* (Chicago: Planners Press, 1995).

³³ For a short piece on the debates about growth management programs, see David Godschalk, "In Defense of Growth Management," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 58, no. 4 (1992). Growth management received a much longer treatment (including a short historical chapter) in Eric Damian Kelly, *Managing Community Growth, Second Edition* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

³⁴ Between 1965 and 1976 nine states adopted new constitutions. See Albert Sturm, "The Development of American State Constitutions," *Publius* 12, no. 1 (1982).

³⁵ Gale, "Eight State-Sponsored Growth Management Programs," p433

³⁶ See Scott Bollens, "State Growth Management: Intergovernmental Frameworks and Policy Objectives," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 58, no. 4 (1992), page 458

³⁷ James Nicholas and Ruth Steiner, "Growth Management and Smart Growth in Florida," *Wake Forest Law Review* 35 (2000), pages 650-651. See also John Degrove and Patricia Metzger, "Growth Management and the Integrated Roles of State, Regional, and Local Governments," in *Growth Management: The Planning Challenge of the 1990's*, edited by Jay Stein (Boston: Sage Publications, 1993).

³⁸ Environmental Land and Water Management Act, State of Florida, 1972. A version of the development of regional impact (DRI) standard was also adopted by the Atlanta Regional Commission for its area plan reviews.

³⁹ Nicholas and Steiner, "Growth Management and Smart Growth in Florida," p656.

⁴⁰ Jimmy Carter, "Executive Reorganization Plan of 1972," *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, January 10, 1972

⁴¹ Jimmy Carter, "State of the State Address," *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, January 14, 1971, page 72

⁴² *Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia*, "Metropolitan River Protection Act," 1973. This came in the face of an effort by several senators from suburban districts south of Atlanta to abolish the Atlanta Regional Commission. See SB 303, *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, 1973.

⁴³ Jimmy Carter, "State of the State Address," *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, January 11, 1973

⁴⁴ Jimmy Carter, "State of the State," *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, January 14, 1974

⁴⁵ *Atlanta Journal*, "Carter Names Growth to Plan State Growth," September 2, 1973; *Atlanta Journal*, "Carter Land-Use Plow Hitched to Balky Team," November 11, 1973

⁴⁶ Schulman, *The Seventies* Chapter 5

⁴⁷ For an overview of Busby's years in office, see Eleanor Main and Gerard Gryski, "George Busbee and the Politics of Consensus," in *Georgia Governors In An Age of Change*, edited by Harold Henderson and Gary Roberts (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988) pages 261-285.

⁴⁸ George Busbee, "Building a New Economic Order," in *Georgia Governors in an Age of Change*, p280.

⁴⁹ "Report of the State Planning and Community Affairs Committee," *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia*, December 1974

⁵⁰ "Report of the State Planning and Community Affairs Committee, 1974.

⁵¹ "Report of the State Planning and Community Affairs Committee, 1974, p4403

⁵² The law governing the effect of land disturbing activity on water quality came on the heels of the new Safe Drinking Water Act passed by the US Congress in 1974. But the state's law was

also prompted by development in metropolitan Atlanta, particularly development along the Chattahoochee River, whose protection by then had been enshrined in the Metropolitan River Protection Act of 1973. See “Erosion and Sedimentation Control Act of 1975,” *Georgia Laws 1975 Session*, 1975, for the full text of the legislation.

⁵³ “Metropolitan River Protection Act Amended,” *Georgia Laws 1975 Session*, 1975.

⁵⁴ See *Georgia’s Environment: Decades of Change*, Environmental Protection Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, April 2002, p8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p9.

⁵⁶ “Unsuspecting Heads May Roll After ’80,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 5, 1979.

⁵⁷ Between 1970-1980, the seven metro counties under ARC’s jurisdiction (Clayton, Cobb, Dekalb, Douglas, Fulton, Gwinnett, Rockdale) grew by 342,000, or 23%.

⁵⁸ Schulman, *The Seventies*, Chapter 9; Weiner, *Urban Transportation*, Chapter 3, p62.

⁵⁹ ARCC, “Atlanta Region: Area Development Profile,” May 1983, p60, 81.

⁶⁰ ARCC, “Annual Report,” 1984; “Growth Pains in Atlanta: Can Atlanta Maintain Quality Growth?” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 15, 1985; ARCC, “Major Development Area Plan Reviews Summary,” March, 1988.

⁶¹ ARCC, “Paper for National Research Council, Transportation Research Board, Major Activity Center Transportation Workshop, September 27-28, 1984” p10-11; ARCC, “Major Milestones,” 1997; ARCC, “ARC Procedures for Review of Comprehensive Local Plans Prepared Under the Minimum Standards and Procedures of the Georgia Planning Act,” 1991

⁶² For details of the projection models at the center of the 1985 RDP update, see ARCC, “Briefing on New Forecasts for the Atlanta Region: 1990, 2000, 2010,” August 1983.

⁶³ Joel Stone, a long-time ARC planner commented on the apparent discord between the RDP and much of the development that was happening across the region during a special staff working session convened just before the 1985 RDP was published: “the reason we are here today is because at Callaway we were talking about the problems, the problems of having development growing in certain areas of the region faster than we can accommodate that growth, of having plans at the regional level and at the local level which do not conform to the growth that we’re having,” ARCC, “Working Session,” July 24, 1985.

⁶⁴ For ARC planning staff opinions about recent Georgia court decisions regarding zoning and the influence of Florida’s compendium of development laws, see ARCC, “Working Session,” July 24, 1985, p52-53 & 69-71. For details about the Florida law passed in 1985, see *Florida’s State Plan: Charting a Future Course* (Graphics United of the Governor’s Office, 1985), a special section published as an insert in the Sunday *Tallahassee Democrat*.

⁶⁵ “Atlanta’s Development Problems Grow on Rising Tide of Water Woes,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 15, 1985

⁶⁶ ARCC, “Workshop on Regionalism in Atlanta,” May 17, 1985; Research Atlanta Collection, “Changing Metro Atlanta, 1984” Box 2, Folder 2

⁶⁷ The background of Joel Cowan is worth noting. Trained as an architect at Georgia Tech, early in his career Cowan had been involved in the planning and building of a master planned new town about 20 miles directly south of downtown Atlanta. Named Peachtree City, the development plan looked like a modified, more auto-centric version of Radburn. Nevertheless, its long-term success is undeniable. Cowan took this early experience throughout his career. He became involved in the early days of both ARC and the Georgia Conservancy (outside of his development business) “New Commission Seeks ‘Practical’ State Growth Strategy: Harris Swearing in 36 Members to Tackle Development Problems,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 16, 1987.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 16, 1987

⁶⁹ ARCC, “Quality Growth Partnership: The Bridge to Georgia’s Future,” *Governor’s Growth Strategies Commission Final Report*, November, 1988, p3-15

⁷⁰ “In Going With the Flow, Governor Harris Hurst Georgia and the System,” *Atlanta Constitution*, December 31, 1988

⁷¹ Joe Frank Harris, “State of the State,” *Journal of the Georgia House of Representatives*, January 11, 1989

⁷² In terms of political style, Carter’s administrative reforms were easily contrasted with Harris’s growth management. While Carter resorted to direct appeals to the state’s voters to get his measures passed, effectively going around his adversaries in the General Assembly, Harris used a softer, more collaborative technique that required him to comprise parts of the bill to see it through. See *Atlanta Constitution*, December 31, 1988.

⁷³ “Growth Bill Endorsed; Harris Strategy Cited,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 22, 1989

⁷⁴ “Weakened Version of Governor’s Land Use Planning Clears House; Compromise Bill Gives General Assembly Power to Shape the Process,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 10, 1989; “Key Bills’ Success is Encouraging to Environmentalists; Growth, Water Supply Are Hot Issues,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 18, 1989; “Legislation on Growth Survives Mostly Intact But Key Programs Not Funded,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 26, 1989.

⁷⁵ A bill to strengthen the state’s soil erosion regulations was passed by both the House and Senate, as was the Mountain Protection Act (?), which would control development on the tallest peaks in the stretches of the Appalachian Mountains in far north Georgia. See “Key Bills...”, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 18, 1989; *Georgia Laws 1989 Session*; “On Eve of Statewide Planning Law, Its Clout Still Unclear,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 13, 1989.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, March 13, 1989.

⁷⁷ *Georgia Laws 1989 Session, General Acts and Resolutions Volume 1*, “State-wide Planning and Development – Governor’s Development Council Created; Regional Development Centers; Local Governments; Department of Community Affairs; Department of Natural Resources; Powers and Duties,” No. 634, Part 1

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, Part 2

⁷⁹ “Bureau of State Planning and Community Affairs,” Act No. 1066, *Georgia Laws, 1970 Session*

⁸⁰ ARCC, “Statewide Planning and Development” Part 3

⁸¹ ARCC, “Statewide Planning and Development” Part 4

⁸² ARCC, “Statewide Planning and Development” Part 5

⁸³ ARCC, “Statewide Planning and Development” Part 6

⁸⁴ “Georgia Water Supply Act – Enactment; Acquisition or Construction of Water Supply Reservoirs by the Department of Natural Resources,” *Georgia Laws 1989 Session, General Acts and Resolutions Volume 1*, 1989

⁸⁵ “Solid Waste Management Act – Permits for Private Solid Waste Disposal Site in Counties of More Than 350,000 and Within Two Miles of an Adjoining County,” *Georgia Laws 1989 Session, General Acts and Resolutions Volume 1; Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia*, Wednesday, February 15, 1989

⁸⁶ “Erosion and Sedimentation Act of 1975 – Land-Disturbing Activity; Rules; Minimum Requirements for Ordinances; Bonds; Costs; Permits; Notices; Penalties,” *Georgia Laws 1989 Session, General Acts and Resolutions Volume 1*

⁸⁷ See *Florida’s State Plan*, 1985.

⁸⁸ “State Land-Use Plan: ‘Hardest Part is Yet to Come’ as Georgia Localities Likely to Fight Growth Rules,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 17, 1989

⁸⁹ Barnes went on to win the governor’s office as a Democrat in 1998, while Isakson (who had lost a 1990 bid for Governor) won the heavily Republican 6th district seat in the U.S House of Representatives vacated by Newt Gingrich in 2000. In 2004 Isakson was elected as one of the state’s U.S. Senators when Zell Miller declined to seek re-election.

Chapter 6

The Battle of the Northern Arc

"That Northern Arc has had a life of its own," said Atlanta City Councilman Doug Alexander. "Every time we've tried to stop it, it keeps coming back to life." – *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 9, 2001

Introduction

By the early 1990s, resistance to regulation, a posture popular among many of Georgia's local politicians, had been tempered by the long-term efforts to expand state control of land development. The effect of environmental regulations and changing standards of planning, most visible in the bundle of planning laws passed in 1989, was beginning to be felt throughout the state, as minimum standards for local comprehensive plans were issued and the first wave of new plans were being reviewed for compliance. In many respects, the new comprehensive planning regulations were the inspiration for the state's entrée into the world of growth management, and that practices developed in metro Atlanta were the model for planning in the rest of the state. By the time the ARC turned twenty years old (1991), the Commission was entering a new phase of realizing the full promise of its scope and influence, building on its status as the center of the

region and state's planning intelligence and continuing to balance its role as arbiter between local government and broader federal and state regulatory authorities.

Through the 1980s, a decade book ended by economic recessions, population and employment growth in Atlanta continued almost unabated. The 1990 Census counted just over 2.8 million souls in the eighteen counties surrounding the City.¹ Ranked as the nation's 12th largest urban region (and the largest MSA), metropolitan Atlanta had again seen population gains of more than 30% during a decade, maintaining its status one of the fastest growing urban regions in the US, growth that unleashed a wave of new urbanization across the low hills of the northern third of the state. The speed with which rural, unincorporated places were overlaid with residential subdivisions and retail shopping centers encouraged a low level consternation over the effects of growth, even as the process of laying plans and infrastructure to support its continuation unfolded. Responding to the obvious on-the-ground changes that were a result of this growth, ARC began preliminary work on its next Regional Development Plan at the end of 1991.

The election of Zell Miller as Governor in 1990, another long-serving Democrat legislator from North Georgia who cut his political teeth under Jimmy Carter, and who would be followed by Roy Barnes in 1998, promised a few more years of comparatively progressive, but decidedly status quo leadership. Since the policies behind the thirty years of development leading up to this moment had been under the control of relatively stable political faction since the early 1970s, broadsides, attempts to overturn the political leadership, were usually mild and only partly successful. Though Atlanta and Georgia had been stepping into a new position on the management and regulation of development, at least in terms of the shape of the regulatory process, the state and the region were in

many respects no different from most other growing Sunbelt places, at least in terms of the visible evidence presented by the built environment.

Two of the most important regulatory changes affecting land use revolved around a few key environmental issues, namely water quality and air quality.² The Clean Water Act in 1972 literally had unleashed millions of federal dollars to build water treatment plants in cities, counties, and small towns around the country, resulting in both markedly cleaner discharges into the nation's surface waterways but significantly increased capacity for wastewater treatment, which encouraged more development.³ Amendments to the Clean Air Act in 1970 and 1977 had helped push the refinement of the tools and techniques for measuring urban air quality and had tied specific measures of air quality to transportation planning and policy. Though air quality in most urban regions showed only minor improvement during the 1970s and 1980s, the science of evaluating air quality improved quite dramatically, which turned out to be a necessary precursor to setting more stringent future air quality goals.⁴

With the passage of another round of amendments to the Clean Air Act in 1990 and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, the federal government rekindled its interest in regional planning. By reversing Reagan's eight year long attempt to reduce and/or remove federal involvement in and oversight of regional planning, the return of powerful controls on development and infrastructure decisions begin pulling authority away from the whims of local politics. The new regulations, signed into law by President George H.W. Bush, provided powerful new support to the work of public regional planning agencies, and offered new tools for furthering the transformation of the standard practices of regional planning.⁵

The 1990 Clean Air Act amendments made urban air quality a high profile environmental issue by setting new ambient air quality standards with lower thresholds of acceptability, which increased the number of heavily populated counties deemed out of compliance and forced many communities along the urban fringe which had previously escaped regulation to confront the effects of their land development and transportation planning practices.⁶ The amendments also saddled the public agencies responsible for managing regional transportation plans with the task of demonstrating that future investments in transportation infrastructure would help improve air quality (rather than merely prevent further decline). ISTEA required a new set of criteria for how transportation funds should be allocated by regional planning agencies, with the intention of promoting more comprehensive and coordinated planning and finding a different balance between expenditures on different transportation modes. Both laws focused on the importance of transportation infrastructure, especially high capacity roads, for its influence on metropolitan development.

Since the 1940s, urban road systems have been planned at a regional scale, and conflicts over the planning and building of roads has offered a window into the intermingling of the political, bureaucratic, and public sides of the regional agencies responsible for transportation planning. On one hand, the conflicts have typically revolved around the introduction of freeways into established urban settings, in the mold of Robert Moses and the Lower Manhattan Expressway, a phenomenon that has been well documented.⁷ The city of Atlanta itself was the site of several such conflicts.⁸ On the other hand, battles over suburban roads that have little impact on established neighborhoods have been far fewer, and have received virtually no documentation. Yet in

the late 1990s, metro Atlanta experienced just such a road battle, centered around a greenfield freeway (nicknamed the Northern Arc – a reference to its shape) that would

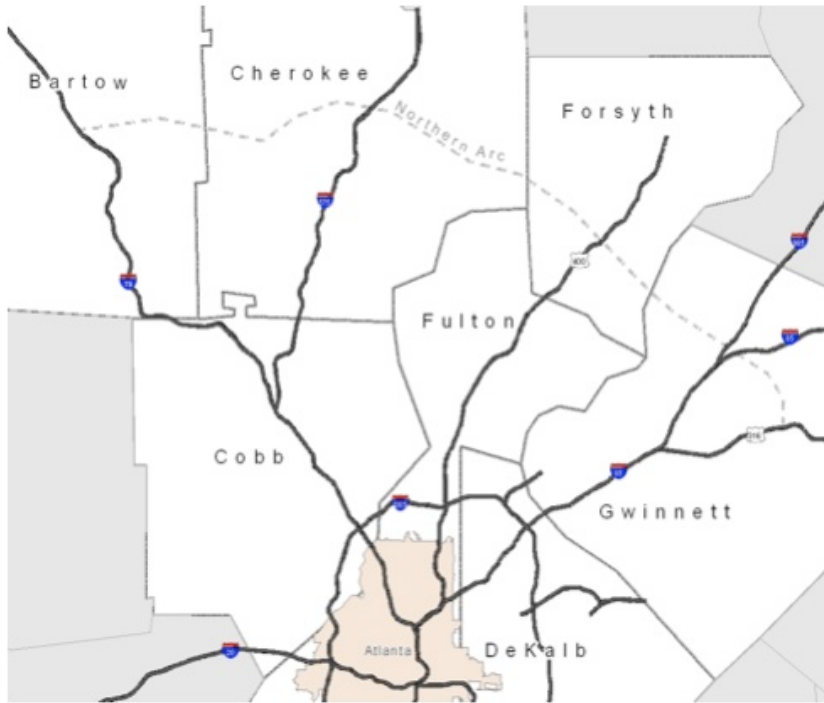


Figure 6.1: Northern Arc

have carved a path primarily through forests and pastures and a small handful of low-density residential subdivisions, well beyond the urban core.⁹ The fight over a limited-access highway that would have crossed the suburbs along the outer edge of

Metropolitan Atlanta offers insight into the history of the region's recent development, revealing the centrality of the ARC's position, the climate of regional planning after the 1989 growth management laws, and the renewed role of federal power after ISTEA/CAA.¹⁰

But examining this road conflict in the suburbs north of Atlanta also allows us to explore the story of Roy Barnes, the final installment in the line of progressive Democrat Governors. During his single term as governor, Barnes helped create and lead a political coalition under the banner of pushing the regional planning agenda into the future, in what would have been another major expansion of state power over existing land

development practices. Yet Barnes's agenda ultimately collapsed under the pressure of attempting to transform the institutions supporting the sustained period of urban growth that has characterized the last three decades. A large part of this collapse stemmed from the Northern Arc. The conflict surrounding the highway was among several events that helped defeat Barnes's re-election, which put a Republican in the Governor's Office and handed control of the state governing apparatus to the GOP for the first time since the end of Reconstruction. At a broader level, the road fight demonstrated the changing character of struggles over the jurisdiction of (sub)urban space, which have their roots in both disputes over racial secession and neighborhood control and the growth of powerful state-level land development regulations.¹¹

Building Up North

Up through the completion of the urban freeway system in the early 1970s, Atlanta's high-capacity road network had been planned and built around a presumption of periphery-to-center mobility.¹² As constructed, the regional freeway system more or less followed routes that had been laid out in 1946, ten years before the Federal-Aid highway system was signed into law and thirty years before the interstates would really begin to help underwrite the region's massive horizontal sprawl.¹³ By 1970, Atlanta's urban system was comprised of four major roads, two that ran north/south (I-75 and I-85), one that ran east/west (I-20), and a ring road (I-285, nicknamed 'the Perimeter') that tied the north/south and east/west roads together. Though the suburban counties north of the city were the largest and most rapidly developing sections of the region, the only high-

capacity east-west route in the vicinity was the northernmost eight-mile stretch of the Perimeter (I-285).

Though the 60-mile Perimeter was designed as a by-pass for long-distance through traffic, not as an urban arterial, new development along the highway had begun to transform its character even before the asphalt dried. Changes in transportation behavior, related to the rise of multiple car households, the on-going entrance of middle-class women into the workforce, and the decline of public transit ridership, contributed to congestion on the road.¹⁴ In the process, I-285 had come to resemble exactly the urban arterial road it had not been designed to become. Drivers quickly learned to use the road to run errands, to shop, and to drive between a suburban home and a suburban workplace. Interchanges operated almost like regular street intersections, with buildings at first huddled at the edges of overpass bridges, and later, higher-rent office towers fronting the stretches of road between interchanges began to sprout, as if overlooking a picturesque promenade or boulevard or river. The utility of the road helped push the number of vehicles traveling along the northern stretch of highway steadily upward over the years, which clogged not just the traffic lanes, but threw gridlock onto the arterial routes that crossed the highway and the segments of the two freeways (I-75 and I-85) that intersected it north of the city.

As the vast unincorporated suburbs north of the city grew through the 1970s and 1980s, a number of large subregional employment and shopping nodes developed along the busy corridors crisscrossing the triangle formed by the intersection of I-75, I-85, and the northern section of I-285. Within the triangle, no less than five major shopping malls opened between 1970 and 1990, each positioned along the same segment of I-285 (which

was rapidly becoming like a decidedly un-quaint Main Street for the entire region). First came the associated retail and commercial concerns that tend to co-locate with anchor shopping centers. Later the corporate back offices came, and then the front offices.¹⁵ All told, this pearl string of development nodes attracted increasing numbers of commuters from all directions, but particularly commuters from other northern suburbs. Between 1960 and 1990, Atlanta's two largest north suburban counties grew dramatically: Gwinnett's population increased by 710% and Cobb's grew by 290%. With the seemingly endless influx of new comers in the 1980s, all constantly driving between population, employment, and shopping nodes, traffic congestion in the northern suburbs had turned into a significant issue by the middle of the 1980s. As employment and residential locations further decentralized, and the distance between them grew, individuals and households were pulled in different directions, some commuting to the central business district but just as many going from suburb to suburb. Without the option of crosstown mass transit, coupled with the wheel-like shape of the freeway system, the vast majority of these commuters drove, and most drove alone.¹⁶

To make matters worse, metro Atlanta's arterial and surface road system varied widely in quality and extent. Major thoroughfares and arterials, many of which were old state routes, wound their way along the region's predominant north/south oriented ridgelines, curving and twisting with the landscape. In general, this class of roads remained part of the state system of general purpose highways, which subjected them to control by the Department of Transportation (and its predecessor agency, the State Highway Division). The region's surface streets, smaller in scale and controlled by local governments, tended to be far less comprehensively developed.¹⁷ For many years,

counties in Georgia had no standardized system for acquiring and planning future public rights-of-way.¹⁸ Since most north Georgia towns dated their origins to the mid-19th century, they had been able to establish grided street networks with little difficulty, but unincorporated counties, which lacked the necessary legal authority, did not. And because so much of metropolitan Atlanta's development was happening in unincorporated areas, a significant portion of the region's surface streets and neighborhood roads were laid out and constructed by individual landowners and developers, only being turned over to local government control once the lots in the residential development had been sold. The vast majority of these routes were designed to only serve specific land subdivisions, which meant that the internal street networks tended to be self-referencing and essentially fenced off (or cul-de-sac'd). Without governmental oversight, adjacent subdivisions were only rarely connected together.

The planning and building of a network of local roads was an expensive proposition that had fallen through the cracks. While in theory road building had been largely left up to local governments, most of them were consistently constrained by funding. Road building is, compared to other local government activities, a capital intensive undertaking that requires money and expertise beyond what most local governments can provide or raise themselves. While capacity building money had been available from the USDOT through the 1970s, Reagan's 1980s agenda had included curtailing federal funding of new infrastructure in favor of managing existing systems, a stance that made finding money to build local roads that much more difficult. And while the state stepped in to pick up some of the slack, much of its focus was trained on building and maintaining the state highway system, which included a large number of so-

called development roads, designed to connect rural counties to the Interstates.¹⁹ The ARC was not in the business of building roads (or anything else), which meant that most counties were left with little alternative but to accept new residential roads as ‘gifts’ from private developers. As a result, aside from a few places, a secondary network of through routes did not emerge by accretion as in other regions of the country. In other words, the grid so common in many urban areas simply never came to exist in metropolitan Atlanta, a fact that forced distributed traffic patterns into a constrained system of arterials and freeways.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the pressure of changing demands on the region’s transportation networks dramatically increased the yearly average number of hours of road congestion. During this period, ARC produced two new Regional Development Plans as well as a series of corresponding regional transportation plans. Both broad and specific in scope, these regional plans together enunciated the form the metropolitan road system should take, a form that continued to reiterate periphery-to-center connectivity. To some extent a product of inertia, the design of the urban freeway system was also related to a long-standing belief among regional planners that maintaining accessibility to Atlanta’s original central city business district (Downtown) and on the emerging Midtown business district would ensure the region’s overall health. Yet the RDPs and transportation plans also projected much of the suburban development that would contradict the intentions of the road system. The widening conflict between infrastructure design, projected development patterns, and limited financial resources was leading to a frustrating situation, one that would be further complicated by the changes in federal transportation and environmental policy in the 1990s.²⁰

Planning For Air Quality

While the popular perception of transportation, and especially automobile congestion, often centered on its economic and social burden (opportunity cost, financial cost, time cost, congestion), by the early 1980s the indicators used to measure and evaluate Atlanta's air quality also revealed an up tick in the number and variety of environmental problems connected to the way the region's transportation system had been constructed and the development it had helped encourage. In short, the rapidly expanding number of automobile and truck trips, spurred by a rapidly growing population and job market spread across the region, appeared to be causing a steady deterioration of the region's air quality.²¹ The consequences of this trend would become apparent by the end of the 1990s, as the federal government, working primarily through EPA, would repeatedly refine and expand the scope of urban air quality regulations.

The history of government concern over urban air quality extends all the way back to 1955, when the first version of the federal Air Pollution Control Act was passed by Congress. The law provided money to support pollution research, but did not specify measures of control. In 1963, Congress passed the first version of the modern Clean Air Act, which established federal interest in pollution control and set the first emissions standards for large stationary sources. In 1967, the Air Quality Act expanded the scope federal involvement beyond setting stationary source standards and into regional ambient air monitoring (Air Quality Control Regions) and point-source inspections, as well as introducing the idea of state implementation plans (SIP) for controlling future pollution.²² While mild in terms of its language and effect, in part a reflection of the imprecision of

environmental science at the time, the 1967 act took the critical step of identifying the long-term environmental side effects that the nation's burgeoning automobile-oriented transportation system might be expected to induce. Major revisions to federal air policy came again in 1970, coinciding with the upwelling of popular support for environmental issues (1970 was the inaugural Earth Day) and the beginning of the congressional debates about a national land use policy. The 1970 amendments to the Clean Air Act transformed the policy into a sharper regulatory instrument, establishing ambient air quality guidelines that urban regions would be expected meet (National Ambient Air Quality Standards – NAAQS), forging much more explicit links between regional plans and environmental quality, and refining the goals of the state implementation plans.²³

In 1977, Congress passed another round of revisions to the Clean Air Act, which better defined its intentions, expanded further the role of states in meeting air quality goals, toughened the requirements for urban areas to remain in compliance, and finally set deadlines by which regions would be expected to demonstrate improvements in ambient air quality. The new amendments required states and their regional planning agencies to work cooperatively to write and adopt a state implementation plan that set out specific steps for managing transportation systems to avoid significant increases in the emission of several measurable atmospheric pollutants. The amendments also established a system to classify counties according to their relative pollution levels, which would in part determine the allocation of future federal transportation funds.²⁴ Once written and approved by the state, the SIP would be sent to EPA for final approval; after a nod from EPA, the SIP would become the primary guiding agreement between urban regions, states, and federal agencies regarding air quality.²⁵

The 1977 clean air amendments stated that responsibility for managing the state air quality program be allocated to an appropriate state agency, which in Georgia was the comparatively green Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the agency Jimmy Carter helped create to consolidate into a single office what had been disparate environmental programs scattered throughout the state bureaucracy. Since the heavily populated counties in the Atlanta region made the biggest contribution to the state's vehicle emissions, and the Clean Air Act was designed to work around county boundaries, the focus of the state's air quality planning would be centered there. Though ARC was the leading agency in process of regional planning, GDOT and DNR played significant roles as well, and with the introduction of new air quality rules, new levels of cooperation between ARC, DNR, and GDOT, were necessary. For this to happen, the process of developing the SIP and ARC's existing transportation planning process had to mutually reinforce one another, which meant that the new air quality requirements needed to fit within existing procedures that defined regional planning.

Because the first measurements of Atlanta's air quality found it within an acceptable range, the first SIP, written and approved in 1980, presented few major suggestions for changing the existing trajectory of development. It's major contribution was outlining a region-wide private vehicle inspection program designed to gather enough data to set a baseline that would then allow the state to monitor changes in automobile emissions over time, which could be used to develop a strategy for further reductions in the future.

But just two years later, in 1982, new air measurements (more accurate) revealed that a significant portion of metro Atlanta was beginning to exceed the minimum

threshold levels for ground-level ozone, one of the two key air quality indicators EPA adopted to enforce the provisions in the latest Clean Air Act updates. As a result, EPA immediately placed ten metro Atlanta counties in the “Serious” category based on elevated levels of ozone.²⁶ This designation meant that DNR, GDOT, and ARC would now be required to revise the region’s transportation plans, measuring those revisions against an air pollution model that correlated infrastructure, travel behavior, and various climatic conditions, in order show that the future impact of regional transportation plans. By virtue of the region’s lapsing air quality designation, ARC’s current plan for future transportation projects would be required to demonstrate that the regional agency was making a good faith effort to reduce emissions and meet future air quality standards. The lapse also meant that all subsequent updates to the region’s transportation plans would have to be tested against EPA’s air quality models.

Over the next eight years, EPA reviewed and approved a number of minor updates to ARC’s regional transportation plans, while continuing to monitor the levels of carbon monoxide and ground level ozone across the non-attainment counties. Despite the regular approvals of the transportation planning process, measurements of CO and O₃ showed levels very slowly but steadily rising across the region.

Yet even with a rapidly growing population, Atlanta’s air quality only fell completely out of compliance with established ground level ozone levels an average of about five days a year between 1983 and 1990, a slight bump from the first few years of the 1980s.²⁷ Some of the change could be attributed to the simple increase in the number of cars and trucks on the roads and the miles those vehicles were driven, a result of a growing and mobile population living in a large, complex metropolitan region. Another

part could be attributed to the vagaries of Atlanta's humid climate and the happenstance that comes with how, when, and where air samples are taken.²⁸ Yet an important part of the increase could only be related to the regional plans themselves, a connection the EPA explicitly made in its regulations. Regional planning agencies were required to use specified urban simulation models to project future air quality based on changes in population, transportation infrastructure, and land use. The EPA used the outputs of the models to determine if a region's planning efforts were on track to meet pre-established air quality standards. The reasoning behind this requirement was simple. An increase in population does not necessarily lead to an increase in automobile trips, or an increase in the length of the average trip, but because of how the plans were written in Atlanta, it did.²⁹

The Outer Perimeter

If ever there was proof that bad ideas never die, we need to look only as far as the ancestry of the Northern Arc, which began life with a more literal name: the Outer Perimeter. The idea for a 200-hundred mile long, limited-access highway encircling all of metro Atlanta was first laid down in plan form in the early 1970s (but was dreamed up in the late late-1960s), toward the end of the halcyon days when the federal transportation funding machine ran smoothly, and was oriented toward big new construction projects rather than maintenance. The earliest incarnation of the road, appearing in the late 1960s as a congestion relief route for I-285, was scuttled by ARMPC and the state before any detailed planning happened.³⁰ In mid-1971 the idea for another, longer version of the outer loop emerged from a General Assembly transportation study committee, though it

gained little traction with the state highway department and quietly disappeared into the night.³¹

As the then-new Atlanta Regional Commission was getting to work, the road was again discussed in a staff report from 1973, which offered up the possibility that a second ring road might be useful if the region met its long-term growth expectations. Within the internal agency conversation at the time, the Outer Loop occupied an intriguing but by no means central position in on-going regional transportation planning efforts. Arguments in favor of building the road included the potential to reroute growing long-distance truck traffic from a trajectory that takes it near the center of the region, providing an additional high-speed, east-west linkage, and boosting the economic development potential of the rural, Appalachian foothills counties north of Atlanta. Arguments against the road cautioned that its ability to relieve or reduce traffic would likely be limited, the exorbitant cost would jeopardize funds for other transportation projects in the state, and its impact on the natural environment would be substantial.³²

By the mid-1970s Atlanta's urban highway segments were complete and final design and preliminary construction on the MARTA heavy rail transit system was underway. When these factors were considered against the Outer Perimeter's estimated cost, and ARC's effort to strike a new balance between investments in roads and other transport modes (at the encouragement of USDOT), the road was pushed onto what seemed like a permanent back burner and out of ARC's long term regional transportation plans.³³

But by the early 1980s, as air quality was beginning to be realized as a powerful tool for reigning in overzealous road building regimes, ironically another push for the

Outer Loop was poised to begin. With Georgia's rapid growth through the 1970s, demand for new road investment ran high. A new state program for developmental highways had been created by the General Assembly in 1989 at the behest of Governor Joe Frank Harris, the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP), a program that provided state funds for planning and building highways in non-urban counties to support economic development. Presided over by the Governor and GDOT, almost all of the GRIP territory remained outside the purview of the Atlanta metropolitan planning apparatus, and thus not subject to its review or federal air quality standards. And while modest development highways were nothing new in the state, the budget for expanding and building bigger highways had grown more substantial as the state's tax revenues had increased.³⁴

Thus under the umbrella of the GRIP, a newer, slightly different version of the Outer Perimeter was proposed by GDOT in 1986. Yet in GDOT's updated estimate, the new version of the Outer Perimeter was expected to cost upwards of \$1 billion, which was far more than GRIP could possibly muster on its own, and there was little prospect for additional help from the federal government. Not easily deterred, GDOT pushed ahead with internal preliminary planning for a few segments of the road, hoping that some as yet untapped source of funding could be generated within the state or a change in federal policy would be in the offing.³⁵ While projects in the developmental highway system continued to move forward each year, the Outer Loop portion garnered no consistent support over the next several years (least of all from Governor Harris), having been discussed in annual budget sessions in the General Assembly, but never having found anyone with enough political muscle to push the project forward. The fact that

certain portions of the road ran right along the edge of ARC's jurisdiction meant that any decision to begin building the road would require the Commission's formal approval. Even with no real support, as a result of size and cost and sheer magnitude the road remained visible, periodically appearing in the pages of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, which kept it closer to the public imagination than its actual likelihood of getting built probably warranted.³⁶

In early 1991, ARC staff began another multi-year process of updating the Regional Development Plan. But this time the update process was redesigned, partly in response to the Georgia Planning Act and partly as a result of ISTEA, to include extensive public input. The new update to the RDP had been dubbed Vision 2020, a clever name that attempted to capture both the 'visioning' at the heart of the process and the planning horizon over which the new plan would stretch. By orchestrating dozens of public events across the region, the level of participation and publicity far outstripped any previous effort. A number of regional issues emerged out of these meetings, but none more challenging and charged than the Outer Perimeter. During the period of public input, the road was a consistent item of discussion (perhaps a result of the *AJC's* reporting), with both proponents and opponents. In effect, the perception of GDOT as the driving force behind the road helped fracture the transportation planning conversation, which was the first step in the transformation of the Outer Perimeter into a central regional conflict. In response to what looked like a looming storm over the issue of the road, and its ability to sustain itself in spite of the odds against it, in 1993 ARC staff (at the direction of its governing board) began an intensive, systematic analysis of the Outer Perimeter, as a side project of the new RDP, which was nearing completion.³⁷

The ARC study of the feasibility of building the road was presented in a series of reports, which attempted to examine a no-build scenario as well as several versions of the road, each varying by extent (some were not complete circles) and length of radius from the central city. Individual segments of several of the versions were also examined separately.³⁸ The staff reports explored the cost of acquiring land and the building costs of the different versions of the road, projected the average number of daily vehicles that would use different stretches of the road, and analyzed likely air quality impacts. Collectively, the reports concluded that any version of the entire loop would be unsuitable, in terms of congestion relief, cost, and environmental externalities. But the reports left open the possibility of a northern segment of the road, a 60-mile stretch between I-85 and I-75 through the most congested part of the region, becoming feasible in the future.³⁹ While far from a glowing endorsement of this segment, the reports suggested further study.

Given the indeterminate effect of the road, the conclusions of the study were not without controversy. As the drafts of the staff reports circulated among ARC's various policy subcommittees, several disagreements arose about what policy recommendations should be issued regarding the road. Though the report considered certain segments of the road to be the more viable than others, even while dismissing the feasibility of the entire road, individual subcommittees came to different conclusions about policy. Some wanted the entire project deleted from the transportation plan, some wanted a few segments of the road but no possibility for anything more, and some wanted the northern segment now plus plans for completing the rest of the road in the future. Within the subcommittees, votes on policy recommendations fell along thin margins.⁴⁰

While the staff reports and subcommittee votes were important, it was up to the full board to vote on a recommendation for what to do about the road. A decision to include or exclude the road from regional development plans would ultimately determine its eligibility for federal funds, which would in turn more or less decide if it would be built. Of course, all of this would depend on the approval of EPA and the impact of the road on the region's air quality.

When the board gathered to vote on a final recommendation, members remained divided on the value of the road. Subcommittee reports had been presented and positions staked. After a rather spirited discussion among the board, a compromise between proponents and opponents was agreed to. Introduced and supported by the commission chair, who had been a vocal supporter of the entire road, the compromise plan directed staff to further analyze the 60-mile northern segment of the road connecting I-75 to Georgia Highway 316 (which would now be known as the Northern Arc) for details about its impact on conformance with federal air quality standards and to search for potential sources of financing. This northern segment of the road had a radius stretching a little more than 30 miles from the central city, and it would connect the region's four major north-south freeway routes, I-75, Georgia 400, I-85, and Georgia 316. The compromise also allowed future study by commission staff of a shorter eastern segment (20 miles) of the road, between I-75 and I-20. Any formal consideration or study of remaining segments of the loop was rejected. Instead, staff was instructed to look for transportation alternatives to building a new road.⁴¹ All of the immediate tasks related to the road would be included in updates to regional transportation plans, a step that would allow projects to move into more detailed design and engineering phases, as funding became available.⁴²

Despite the staff research studies and the resolution of the ARC board, there was still little indication that money would be available to actually engineer and build the Northern Arc, given what was only an estimated price tag and very preliminary research into routing. While including the Northern Arc in the region's transportation plans opened the door to design and construction, and certainly signaled a new level of intent, the road remained mired in public controversy and bore the stigma of becoming the largest transportation project in the state's history (even though its price tag was just an estimate). ARC was far from committed to the project, and the hurdles that remained would ultimately prove too much to overcome.⁴³

Air Quality Gets Serious

Stepping back to 1991, recognition of the region's burgeoning air quality problem was reverberating loudly throughout the planning and development community.⁴⁴ One year earlier, Congress had passed a major amendment to the Clean Air Act, transforming the law again, reclassifying acceptable levels of pollutants, specifically targeting mobile sources of emissions, and directing state, regional, and local governments to come up with new ways to deal with seemingly intractable urban air quality problems. As a result of these changes, more counties were added to the list of those that violated pollution thresholds on a periodic basis and some counties were bumped from a lower category to a higher category. New deadlines were established for non-attainment counties and regions to demonstrate how their efforts would address sources of air pollution (particularly mobile sources). The new law promised that without concerted action, particularly dirty urban regions would begin to see their access to federal transportation funds restricted.

Thirteen counties (up from ten) in metro Atlanta were promptly deemed out of air quality compliance upon the adoption of the new 1990 clean air standards. In an effort to reduce the overall impact of mobile source emissions on the nation's air, the new amendments (like the earlier amendments) required urban regions deemed non-compliant to revise their future transportation plans to clearly show how they would bring about a fifteen percent improvement in the measure of two major air pollutants, ozone and carbon monoxide, between 1994 and 1996. After 1996, however, a three percent per year rate of improvement was required until 1999, at which point a re-evaluation would occur.

The revisions to the CAA directed the states to continue to play an integral role in the process of demonstrating improvement.⁴⁵ An update to the existing State Improvement Plan (SIP) was required to set new air quality standards that reflected the improvements required by the act. To meet the new deadlines, ARC, DNR, and GDOT developed an update to the SIP and submitted it to EPA in 1993 (around the time the Outer Loop was being debated by ARC). After initial tests of the revised SIP, EPA ruled that the plan as written did not effectively show how metro Atlanta's non-attainment counties would meet air quality standards by the 1999 deadline, sending the plan back to the state for revision. Thus began a back and forth between the state and EPA over the fate of the air quality plan. Between 1993 and 1996, DNR, ARC, and GDOT were given a series of extensions, which ostensibly gave them time to revise the plan into a condition that would pass EPA's compliance test.

Because of the serious air quality status of Atlanta's metro counties, an approved SIP was non-negotiable; it had to become a central piece of the region's transportation plans. Without an acceptable SIP, EPA would refuse to approve any further updates to

regional transportation plans (because updates had to show conformance with the standards set out in the SIP). Without updated and conforming transportation plans, many transportation projects would no longer be eligible for federal funding. Therefore an approved SIP was a critical step if the region expected to continue receiving its share of federal transportation funds. At the end of this period, if the agencies failed to produce a qualifying plan, the state would be left in a difficult position, unable to demonstrate compliance and subject to the loss of a portion of its federal transportation funds (though it was uncertain whether EPA would hold to its initial standards).⁴⁶

During the period (1993 to 1996) of negotiation, shifting compromises between the EPA, DNR, GDOT, and ARC allowed transportation funding to continue to flow even as the actual planning strategies the region would use to pull itself into conformity with ambient air quality standards were still being settled. Finally, in mid-1996, a revised draft of the SIP was tested against EPA's air quality model as required by the CAA. The plan failed again. Contrary to its stated intent, the state's plan, more specifically the projects contained therein, showed air quality actually getting worse by 1999, leading the region in the opposite direction of its goal. As expected, EPA indicated that it would stick to its earlier promise that without an approved plan, any project designed to add road capacity would be ruled ineligible to receive federal funds beginning in early 1997 and continuing until the state presented an approvable SIP (requests for funds to support non-motorized infrastructure or managing existing infrastructure projects would remain eligible).

The local reaction was swift. The media editorialized vehemently, arguing that the state's failed plan was a pointed indictment of metro Atlanta's broken transportation

planning process.⁴⁷ The political boards of ARC and GDOT absorbed the brunt of this criticism. The impact of EPA's decision, and the publicity it generated, forced ARC and its partners to immediately revisit the plan, this time with a sense of urgency. Thus began a haphazard process of removing road projects from the plan in the hope of getting down to a set of projects that could pass air quality tests, including some that were politically popular but environmentally damaging (and contributed to the rejection of the SIP).⁴⁸ EPA's decision to hold fast on its threat to cut funding was a wake up for many who had either assumed a compromise would be reached or lacked a nuanced understanding of how the regional planning process had been changing, and set off a frantic scramble by ARC and the state to quickly revise the region's transportation plans, which meant learning to walk a very fine line between necessary and politically possible actions. There were attempts in several suburbs to develop local sources of road funding that would not be subject to federal review, thus providing a backdoor for deleted projects to go forward, but due to the tremendous cost and complexity of planning and building roads, these efforts failed.⁴⁹

The state also pursued several broader strategies that would hopefully help demonstrate concrete steps toward future air quality improvement. In addition to changing the balance of road projects versus non-motorized projects, the strategies included a major expansion of the regional auto emissions testing program. Mandatory, bi-annual testing of all private vehicles was expanded from the region's four core counties to all thirteen in the non-attainment zone, and was accompanied by lowering the thresholds. Emissions was a politically easy sell since it required only minor change in behavior and standard practice, and could be accomplished without the approval of the

General Assembly. And projects deemed to be non-polluting, sidewalks, bike lanes, intersection improvements, were still permitted, so ARC encouraged metro counties to move quickly to add requests for money to build non-auto infrastructure to the list of projects to be funded, even as certain road projects had been targeted for removal. ARC, GDOT, and DNR continued to deliberate over revisions to the SIP and regional transportation plans during the remainder of 1996, though amid an increasingly confused and acrimonious context.⁵⁰ An easy solution to a looming restriction on building new road capacity was not forthcoming. Compromise proved to be a nearly impossible conundrum: no one wanted to give up projects but no one wanted to lose federal money.

In a rather disingenuous attempt to circumvent EPA's pending enforcement action, in very early 1997 ARC and GDOT together came up with a plan to 'grandfather' several of the problematic capacity-adding transportation projects just as the freeze in federal money was due to take effect. By rushing through the environmental impact statement process, using an expedited approval, the grandfathering plan would have allowed almost 30 separate capacity adding projects to move forward before funds were cut. In fact, the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments did provide for a process for grandfathering transportation projects that had been budgeted if they also had approved environmental impact statements complete by the time a funding freeze went into effect. Under the grandfathering exception, the projects would be allowed to move forward even if the region failed to develop a transportation plan that conformed to air quality regulations. But in order for grandfathered projects to move forward, both the USDOT and EPA had to fully sign off, signaling all necessary planning activities were in place and accomplished in good faith.

Then, in June 1997, the Clinton Administration announced that the EPA would impose tougher ground-level ozone standards for urban regions, making compliance for existing non-attainment metropolitan areas like Atlanta more difficult but simultaneously granting those regions an extra five years to demonstrate efforts to comply (pushing the deadline back to 2004 from 1999). The rule change presented a decision: keep existing, lower air quality standards but meet the earlier deadline, or buy some time but face a higher threshold down the line. As discussions continued between ARC and GDOT about which path to take and how to keep the grandfathered projects in the plan, another intentional loophole in the 1990 CAA amendments prompted questions from environmental organizations about the legality of their tactic.⁵¹

In late 1997, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) wrote a letter to USDOT charging that Atlanta officials were disingenuously manipulating the grandfathering clause in the CAA, violating federal laws in the process.⁵² One of the features of the Clean Air Act was the relatively open door for lawsuits. In effect, the 1970 amendments were designed to allow legal action as a check on the regulation and enforcement process. Environmental organizations were able to take advantage of this opening to force government to take action in cases where action was needed but government had failed.⁵³ As a result of the EDF request, USDOT turned its attention to several of the projects in ARC's list, asking new questions about the legitimacy of their grandfathered status and the completeness of the environmental impact statements filed on their behalf. But even as the projects were being scrutinized, ARC and the state put their heads down and plowed ahead, passing an interim transportation plan at the end of December that

included the entire list of grandfathered projects, even the ones still under federal scrutiny (all of which were in the end given the green light).

With interim plans in place to keep the transportation planning process going over the short term, the commission and the state turned their full attention in the new year to creating a long-term transportation plan (SIP) that would bring the region into conformity with air quality standards and release the planning process from the EPA's grip.⁵⁴ But in November 1998, ARC's efforts to quietly maintain its process were shaken by a threatened lawsuit from several local environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and the Georgia Conservancy (represented by attorneys from the Southern Environmental Law Center), which alleged that the actions of the ARC, the state, USDOT, and EPA to continue the existing transportation planning process and grandfather projects were purposive efforts to undermine the spirit of the regulations designed to clean up the region's air.⁵⁵

The following February (1999), the group made good on its threat and filed the first of what would be a series of lawsuits (enough that group would later be nicknamed the 'Roadblockers' by the local media). The lawsuits variously charged that ARC and GDOT, with USDOT and EPA approval, illegally attempted to include road building projects under the grandfather clause of the Clean Air Act. The agencies attempted to put these projects into the existing funding pipeline, despite the fact that construction had not begun and several of the projects did not have approved environmental impact statements, and all in spite of the fact that there was no conforming SIP.⁵⁶

In March, the U.S. Appeals Court for the federal district in Washington DC ruled in a different, but analogous case that the prevailing standards USDOT was using to

determine if grandfathered road projects would be allowed in areas in violation of the Clean Air Act was in fact illegal, a decision that did not bear directly on metro Atlanta but served notice that a settlement between ARC and the environmental plaintiffs would likely benefit everyone involved, especially the state (which had the most to lose). And that is what happened the following June, when an out-of-court settlement was negotiated that canceled the vast majority of the grandfathered road projects, provided for an independent panel of experts to oversee ARC's air quality modeling process during the ongoing update to regional transportation plans, and required an analysis of the likely impact of the proposed transportation plans on low-income and non-white populations.⁵⁷

In the meantime, ARC and the state had completed further revisions to the State Implementation Plan and resubmitted the plan for EPA evaluation. In December 1999, EPA notified ARC and Georgia DNR that its latest version of the SIP, while close, again failed to show that metro Atlanta would be able to meet future air quality standards with the mix of projects included in the plan. In response, the state quickly changed the plan according to EPA's suggestions, which included expanding the number of counties covered by annual auto emissions testing, instituting stricter pollution controls on industries in counties on the fringes of metro Atlanta, upgrading the pollution control systems of several electric power plants close to Atlanta, and requiring a lower-sulfur fuel to be sold in most North Georgia counties. Based on these changes, EPA finally approved the state's revised SIP in February 2000.⁵⁸

Roy Barnes

Zell Miller hid somewhere in the Governor's office during the 1990s, while Atlanta's transportation planning process slowly worked its way into crisis. While at the time he could have been described as a comparatively liberal Democrat from a small, rural county in northeastern Georgia, Miller had mostly remained out of the spotlight on the state's transportation problems. Staking his legacy on education reform and overseeing the introduction of the state lottery, planning and the natural environment had never been one of Miller's pet issues. He had earned his political chops first as a legislator in the 1960s, as chairman of the state democratic party during Jimmy Carter's term, and then as Lt. Governor to both George Busbee and Joe Frank Harris' Lt. during the late 1970s and 1980s. Winning the 1990 gubernatorial election, and again in 1994, Miller remained more or less hands off on big planning and environmental issues, leaving that work to his close political allies at the Department of Transportation, and since much of the Atlanta controversy unfolded toward the end of this second term, he let the issue fall to whoever would become the next Governor.⁵⁹

Roy Barnes, who had been an important player in the legislature almost from the moment he was first elected to the General Assembly in 1974, emerged early on as a contender for the Governor's office during the 1998 campaign season. Closely associated with Joe Frank Harris, and with a vocal interest in metro Atlanta, planning, and environmental issues, Barnes was the embodiment of a moderate, Clinton-esque democrat from one of the more conservative corners of Atlanta's suburbs. Winning the November general election over a well financed but emotionally uninspiring Republican, Barnes had campaigned on a platform that made reforming Atlanta's regional planning process one of his key planks. Among other promises, Barnes vowed to break the air

quality logjam that had been building during the two years before the election. In a state that appeared to be increasingly trending Republican and suburban, Barnes offered a balance of connectedness to the state's old, mostly rural political guard (required to get anything through the legislature), sensitivity toward new suburban issues, and a progressive environmentalism that resonated with the urban electorate. With metro Atlanta falling out of air quality compliance, the suspension of a portion of federal road building funds, and a pending lawsuit by a collection of environmental organizations, the business-as-usual arrangement that long characterized the region's existing planning process was beginning to show signs of unraveling. Barnes came into office with a self-assigned mandate to do something to get the regional transportation planning process back into compliance, while protecting the state's natural resources and ensuring continued economic growth.⁶⁰ Among other things, he promised to help create a powerful new regional planning authority that would significantly expand land development controls, an effort that would in some respects define his legacy.

Though young, Barnes arrived at the doorstep of the Governor's mansion as a relatively old legislative hand. By the time he won the Governor's Mansion, Barnes had served 22 years in the General Assembly, 16 in the senate and six in the house. Perhaps more importantly, he had been one of the floor leaders in 1989 when the bills to create the Georgia Planning Act were ushered through the legislature. Having worked on such significant legislation, laws that changed the practice of local government planning, Barnes was versed in the details of planning and environmental policy as well as political expediency. He had experienced the sensitive politics of convincing rural legislators to accept greater state control of land development practices, an idea that often directly

contradicted their political identities. But with the publicity Atlanta's air quality crisis had generated, establishing a new and substantially more powerful regional planning agency, in effect another step in the on-going extension of state power, became Barnes' most urgent post-election priority, and one he wasted little time pursuing.⁶¹

Introducing the bill that would become the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) in the first weeks of the 1999 session of the General Assembly, Barnes worked to push the legislation quickly through in order to avoid as much resistance as possible. Drawing on his legislative experience, Barnes understood that by acting quickly, and striking early in the session, most legislators would know little about the bill they were voting on, thereby increasing its chances of passing.⁶² The idea of an agency like GRTA, with the power to raise bonds, veto zoning decisions, and built transportation systems, had been around the region for many years, and could be dated all the way back to the origins of the ARC. Yet honest attempts at building an agency with so much authority had never really gained much foothold. During the late 1960s, when the fate of Atlanta's regional planning agency was being debated, conversations about the shape the new agency should take regularly mentioned including zoning review and revenue raising, as well as direct election of its political board, but none of those powers made it into the final version of the ARC legislation. Over the next twenty years, expanding the power of the Commission had been a discussion endemic to the regional planning community, but moves to actually go through the process never moved into the necessary legislative context.⁶³ But in the mid-1990s, as the transportation crisis was beginning to coalesce, the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce convened a group of business and government leaders to come up with ideas for solving the region's air

quality crisis. The idea that emerged, a throwback to conversations about ARC, was an agency along the lines of GRTA.⁶⁴

A powerful governmental body on paper, the legislation that created GRTA opened a new front in the relationship between the state, the region, and local governments. In short, the agency was directed to support and strengthen existing programs for coordinating land use and transportation planning across jurisdictions in metro Atlanta, serving as an intermediary between the state and ARC. Among the powers granted the Authority was the ability to float public bonds to raise capital funds, revise and modify regional transportation plans, build and operate transit systems, and overrule local zoning decisions on major projects. Having such a broad array of powers, GRTA was met with a heightened sense of expectation, which ranged from glee to outright hostility (depending on the source). With the explicit support of the conservative metropolitan business community and a collection of traditional liberal allies (blacks, urban whites, environmentalists), Barnes and GRTA were together expected to mount a vigorous response to the crisis of out-of-control urban sprawl and traffic congestion, and present another installment in the accumulation of control over land development.⁶⁵

The new authority was to be governed by a 15-member board appointed by the Governor. Joel Cowan, a local planner/developer with deep political connections to Harris and Barnes, and who had been instrumental in the development of the Georgia Planning Act, was named chairman of the new agency, and a professor of city planning from Georgia Tech was hired as executive director. Other members of the board included Barnes' friends, political contributors, and a few prominent members of the business and political community (including Shirley Franklin, future Mayor of the city of

Atlanta). Members would serve at the pleasure of the Governor. In the event of a change in administration, they would be subject to replacement. In its earliest days in mid-1999, GRTA worked to clarify its role in the region, build relationships with ARC and GDOT, and set up an administrative structure (including building a modest professional staff) that would allow it to carry out its charge. By the end of GRTA's first year in operation, the agency had requested a 600% increase in its budget to fund a substantial expansion of its staff, and had begun to exert itself in the regional planning process.⁶⁶

After ARC approved a revised transportation plan in October of 1999, GRTA faced its first major test early in 2000: reviewing the plan before its submission to EPA, which required close collaboration between the two agencies. Since EPA had tentatively approved Georgia's SIP in February of 2000, the path for getting the USDOT stamp of approval on the region's transportation plans was finally clear, pending GRTA's agreement. That previous August (1999), evidence of the difficulty of integrating GRTA into the work of ARC and the pre-existing regionalist coalition had been reported in the local media. Observers were worried that conflict between the agencies might destroy the planning process and any hopes for solving the region's planning problems. Nevertheless, whatever initial conflict existed between the agencies slowly resolved itself as the agencies worked together during the coming months. In June of 2000 GRTA unanimously approved the updated transportation plan.⁶⁷ During the subsequent twelve months, GRTA began moving more aggressively to make its presence felt across the region, negotiating a contract to plan and operate a local bus system in Clayton County, convincing ten counties to join a metropolitan-wide commuter bus network, and getting involved in the process of reviewing major regional developments. Despite much initial

hand wringing about GRTA's potential role in the region, particularly among local governments, by early 2001 the agency had begun to look like the firm but reasonable guiding hand that it was supposed to be.⁶⁸

Gearing Up For Battle

In the wake of EPA's approval of Georgia's SIP in February of 2000, controversy over the process used to reach agreement on the plan intensified. Though approval of the plan was pending, it had not yet been fully signed off on by USDOT, questions about the legality of the updates continued to surface. And with final approval looming, the door would be open for ARC and the state to move forward with final approval of updates to regional transportation plans, thereby fully re-opening the flow of federal road building money. Once this step had been taken, an injunction would be much more difficult to obtain. The collection of local and national environmental agencies that had stepped in to challenge (and successfully thwart) ARC and GDOT's previous attempts to grandfather transportation projects had become quite interested in using Atlanta as a test case of the strength of the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act. Therefore in April, before USDOT or GRTA approved the regional transportation plan, and after an inquiry about the agreement between ARC, the state, and EPA failed to produce an acceptable response, the environmentalist collective filed a suit in Atlanta's federal district court against EPA, charging that the agency illegally extended the state's compliance deadline and approved a plan based on potentially flawed motor vehicle emissions data.⁶⁹

In June, GRTA approved the plan, but in July the court granted a stay, preventing USDOT and EPA from giving final approval to the plan until the full case against the agencies could be heard.⁷⁰ The controversy over the injunction necessitated a quick

response from the state. In the early fall, Governor Barnes stepped into the fray after the environmental group indicated it would accept an out-of-court settlement rather than take the case all the way through the court. By late December, an agreement had been crafted and signed onto by both parties. In many respects, the agreement mirrored the one agreed upon the year before (prior to the lawsuit). It required the state to speed up construction of HOV lanes on area interstate highways, complete a major study of the health effects of air pollution on the region's residents, strive for reductions in ground-level ozone, and put more emphasis on the transportation needs of the regions' low-income, transit-dependent population. With the settlement, the environmental group dropped its suit.⁷¹

In January 2001, not even a month into the settlement, the state backed away from the table and the agreement collapsed, largely because of a dispute over how the agreement would be enforced and who would be responsible for monitoring its progress. Then, defying the good faith displayed in the agreement, the ARC and the state immediately went ahead with their request for the immediate release of federal transportation funds based on the transportation plan tentatively approved by EPA the previous summer, thereby rejecting the terms of the out of court settlement. In an effort to prevent the funds from being released, the environmentalists filed a second lawsuit in late January charging that EPA had broken the law by failing to reclassify metro Atlanta's air pollution, from the serious to the severe category, when the state missed the original 1999 deadline to demonstrate its SIP would lead to compliance. In February, the group filed a separate suit, this time naming ARC, GDOT, USDOT, EPA, and FHWA/FTA as defendants, alleging that the regional transportation plan submitted to

USDOT in support of releasing funds was based on bad data and misleading assumptions. And to allow sufficient time for those suits to move forward, the environmentalists requested an injunction in April to immediately stop construction on any projects included in the contested transportation plan.

The flurry of lawsuits seemed to suggest that ARC's transportation planning program was bound for a major transformation. The promise using the revised Clean Air Act as a planning tool looked to be on the cusp of being fulfilled. But in June of 2001, the tide began to turn, or at least move in a different direction. A federal district court judge in Atlanta denied the injunction request, allowing the process of programming construction schedules to continue, and signaling the possibility that the eventual ruling would be in favor of the defendants. This was a major blow to the plaintiffs. And around the same moment, amid the cacophony of back and forth arguments about the legality of ARC's transportation planning process, Barnes unveiled the outline of a five-year, \$8.3 billion transportation plan for the state that would dramatically accelerate the completion of a number of projects in long-term transportation plans. Designed to be a largely state-funded initiative to speed up the regular regional transportation planning process, the legislation necessary to the funding mechanisms of the plan was set to be introduced into the 2002 session of the General Assembly. By prioritizing air-quality friendly transportation projects, the plan would hopefully meet quick EPA/USDOT approval and convince interested parties of the state's seriousness about addressing the complaint that it had failed to comprehend the detrimental environmental side effects of the existing transportation planning process. Barnes' plan introduced a new source of state financing that could be used to fund an array of big-ticket transportation projects. Among the

projects included in the plan were new high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes for Atlanta's Interstate highway segments, new light rail lines, a commuter rail system, improvements to a number of overburdened intersections, and a region-wide express bus system.⁷² But the one project in the plan that received the most attention was the anticipated allocation of enough money to begin building the Northern Arc.

Though the inclusion of the Northern Arc in the Governor's proposal appeared to surprise many of the parties looking in, and certainly was the detail that garnered the strongest reaction, Barnes' decision to include the road as part of his transportation plan was not exactly unexpected. Interest in some version of the Northern Arc was long-standing. It had been studied, put into transportation plans, and taken out of transportation plans, enough to have become a near constant background project in the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP) and a periodic topic reported in the *Journal-Constitution*. And big road projects were an old interest of many of the rural legislators with whom Barnes had alliances and connections.

In most respects, this was just another big road, basically the same version of the Northern Arc that had been debated before, spanning the distance between I-75, I-85, and Georgia 316, only with one important change. Long considered the most critical (and controversial) stretch of the original Outer Perimeter, Barnes attempted to minimize the physical and emotional impact of the road by proposing turning the Northern Arc into a toll road, with a limited number of interchanges, and a permanent, undeveloped green buffer along both sides.⁷³ Yet in spite of the changes to the road's design and the inclusion of so many air-friendly transit projects, an inescapable issue (one that

intensified the sense of urgency) was that the Governor's transportation plan would also accelerate considerably the start of the road's construction.

The creative twist to funding so many huge construction projects during such a short period lay with the Georgia Road and Tollway Authority. An agency originally established in 1953 to oversee any future toll roads constructed in the state (the only toll road in the state is a section of Georgia 400 between I85 and I285), the Road and Tollway Authority was substantially renovated in a bill passed by the General Assembly during the 2001 session (Barnes lobbied hard for the bill).⁷⁴ The bill broadened the scope of the Authority, permitting it to raise money for transportation projects and move that money to projects around the state. In its revised form, the Road and Tollway Authority could raise money for transportation projects by selling state bonds that would be backed both by anticipated annual federal transportation allocations (determined by Congress on a year-by-year basis) and by reallocating funds collected from the state's two toll roads.⁷⁵

After the initial shock and the dimensions of the financial obligations the plan entailed began to sink in, the details of its funding arrangements created almost as much controversy as the Northern Arc. The bonds to be used as the primary funding source for the plan, Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicles (GARVEE), allowed the state to assume significant bond debt that would be guaranteed by anticipated federal transportation allocations, even though there was no assurance that future revenues would be sufficient to cover the cost of that debt, since Georgia's allocation of federal transportation funds for capital projects is subject to the winds of politics and can shift from year to year. Moreover, after the new transit systems were up and running, the state would have to assume responsibility for their continuing operation, a prospect that was almost certain to

provoke backlash once local governments were asked to shoulder their share of this burden. Nevertheless, the economy was good and bond markets were forecasted to be strong and most bond analysts expected Georgia to be able to successfully manage the debt it would take on.⁷⁶

But by the middle of the summer, serious questions had begun to dog Barnes's plan beyond the bond problems, perhaps foreshadowing its ultimate fate.⁷⁷ The environmental collective that had sued ARC and the state in previous months raised new questions about the plan's ability to improve accessibility for the low-income, transit depend population, and reiterated their concerns about the willingness of ARC to follow through with a plan that would improve air quality.⁷⁸ An emerging voice in the wilderness, a small but vocal chorus of homeowners near the path the Northern Arc would cut worried about the fate of their homes and subdivisions and whether the road would alleviate traffic congestion.⁷⁹ And while all the projects the Governor had proposed were already in the regional plan, control over when individual projects would be pushed into the design and construction phase remained with ARC, which because of its obligations to federal regulations had the final word on the timing of the release of funds. Finally, comments by a few members of the ARC board suggested that some of the Governor's favored projects might be held up in retaliation for his not taking their concerns into account during the development of his plan.⁸⁰

Yet it turned out to be the looming prospect of the Northern Arc that shut down Barnes's immediate transportation plan, as well as the longer-term prospect of pushing forward another expansion of state control over land development. Arguments for and against the inclusion of the road in regional transportation plans centered on its perceived

ability to relieve congestion, potential to push the urban fringe further into the countryside, and whether such a large investment in a single project created an unfair balance in transportation spending within the region. Despite ARC analyses that indicated that the road would likely do very little to reduce congestion on the existing perimeter highway and even less to improve the region's air quality, the absence of any reliable funding source, and pressure from the local media, the road survived a number of close ARC board votes, any of which could have killed the project. Though barely hanging on to life, the bits of money that had been allocated to the Northern Arc through the GRIP program provided just enough for GDOT to undertake preliminary engineering studies and to maintain a slow paced property acquisition scheme for the road right-of-way. Thus even while the fight over Atlanta's transportation planning crisis was unfolding, a portion of the preparation work was already underway.⁸¹

The bond issue, the transit-dependent, the suburban homeowners, and the Northern Arc all became fodder in a larger battle between the Governor, ARC, and the environmentalists over control of the regional planning process, a battle that rattled the regional planning community. The apparent suddenness of Barnes' plan, and its complexity, quickly carved the regional leadership up, but not necessarily into cleanly separated groups. Among Barnes' supporters, which included many of his core constituents, feelings about the plan, and the road, were divided. Even members of GRTA's board, individuals appointed by the Governor himself, split in their opinions about the feasibility of the plan overall, and especially the potential long-term impact of the Northern Arc on the region. The ARC board reacted similarly. Though the agency had provided much of the background study of and debate about the road over the years,

members were nevertheless torn over the Governor's plan and the effect the Northern Arc would have on the shape of the region.⁸² Accusations of ethical violations among certain members of the boards of ARC, GRTA, and GDOT, a few of who owned potentially valuable land near the route of the proposed road, further complicated the picture. In addition to its dubious environmental impact, by late 2001 the Northern Arc was beginning to look more like the Governor's pet political project, rife with corruption.⁸³

The problem of maintaining Atlanta's regional growth trajectory was growing ever more complex as the troubles over transportation and land use patterns intensified during late 2001. Lawsuits and settlements added to the milieu of confusion, and the sheer scope and appeal of the Governor's plan and funding package further complicated the picture. So much of what was being offered had been on various wish lists for years, and the prospect of seeing those projects on a fast track to completion proved terribly enticing. At minimum, the plan offered a bold, if flawed, pathway out of the impasse. And the prospects for the plan's success got a boost in January 2002, when a federal judge ruled that the transportation plan the region was operating under, and the process behind it, was in fact legal. Planning for construction projects would be allowed to proceed unfettered, at least while the environmental groups decided whether to appeal the decision.⁸⁴

In a milieu of uncertainty over the region's future direction, the Northern Arc turned into a spark that exploded Barnes' plan in three somewhat separate moments. The plan that could have signaled a new era of cooperation turned into a major setback. The inclusion of the road in metro Atlanta's long-term transportation plan created a complex set of battle lines that broke across traditional political boundaries, creating perhaps

unexpected alliances. Though arriving at this point from different directions, the groups involved found in each other a shared enemy (the Governor). Among the different sides in the battle was a coalition of liberal, central-city environmental organizations who had been working for several years to push the ARC and GDOT toward more balanced transportation planning that took better account of environmental effects, travel mode, and accessibility. There was a vocal group of affluent homeowners in parts of the fast growing, Republican-dominated suburban counties north of the city, driven by the annoyance of increasing traffic, who gathered under a banner of stopping the road from tearing up the lives they had the good fortune to build. Another side was the Governor himself, the state agencies under his authority (GRTA and GDOT), and a number of land developers, long-time associates, and other sympathizers, all of whom openly supported the construction of the road for one reason or another. And a fourth side included ARC, the Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and the Georgia Conservancy, organizations that represented the core regional planning coalition and were perhaps the longest term players in the region's planning and development. This group had worked with the Governor to confront the air quality crisis and had supported many of his efforts to move the state's interest in regional planning forward, in a more balanced direction. But more recently these organizations occupied a limbo, mostly opposing the road but also reticent to scrap the Governor's proposal simply to kill the Northern Arc.⁸⁵ With lines drawn in the red clay, the sides came to a standstill as challenges to the legality of ARC's plan to comply with air quality regulations were decided in the federal district court in downtown Atlanta. Meanwhile, the Georgia Road and Tollway Authority quietly

got on with the business of pre-qualifying engineering and construction firms interested in building the first phase of the Northern Arc and other projects.⁸⁶

Barnes Loses

On July 5, 2002, the first break in the standoff came when Barnes, finally realizing the damage the battle over the road could cause his political career, requested ARC to set aside the Northern Arc, effectively removing it from the regional transportation plan, until a stronger conflict of interest law could be passed in the next session of the General Assembly.⁸⁷ More evidence had emerged that a number of donors to Barnes' re-election campaign owned land near the route of the proposed road, causing quite a stir. A number of members of the boards of GDOT and ARC also were involved in decisions that would potentially benefit them, creating an apparent conflict of interest. Several ARC and GDOT board members resigned in the wake of the revelations. As this was happening, the Governor claimed his decision to suspend any further consideration of the road would clear up intimations of unethical behavior and would only delay the start of construction by several months.⁸⁸

In late August, the second break in the standoff came when the suburban homeowners and urban social and environmental activists united in their opposition to the Northern Arc, creating a new organization called the Northern Arc Task Force. This diverse anti-road coalition of upper-middle-class homeowners and experienced social activists was able to muster significant resources (financial and organizational) in their fight against the governor's transportation plan.⁸⁹ The group hired the state's former attorney general to represent them and filed their own lawsuit in the Fulton County

Superior Court against Barnes, the Road and Tollway Authority, and GRTA, alleging that the bond and toll program targeted as the funding vehicle for the Governor's transportation proposal violated Georgia's state constitution. Because the controversial bond program also was designed to fund almost all of the accelerated transportation projects in Barnes' plan, the lawsuit threatened commuter bus service, arterial road improvements, and transit expansion as well. In mid-September, a superior court judge ruled that the plan for selling bonds was not unconstitutional as it stood, but left open the possibility for an appeal to the Georgia Supreme Court, which the Task Force did almost immediately.⁹⁰

In the meantime, the Task Force's effort was bolstered by events outside their control. While the battle over the Northern Arc unfolded, new residential developments continued to sprout along the proposed road corridor on parcels GDOT did not own. Though the location of these subdivisions was not planned to thwart efforts to build the road, that is precisely the effect they had. With each new house in or near the corridor, the price of the Northern Arc inched up just a little bit, and the legal difficulty of acquiring property got a little bit thornier. Added up over time, several hundred high-priced houses could make a significant difference in GDOT's ability to buy land for a road right of way. With Barnes up for reelection, the Republican contenders had seized on the transportation plan controversy, turning it into a major campaign issue. They all claimed to object to using GARVEE bonds to fund transportation infrastructure and promised to kill the Northern Arc, the transportation plan, and the funding program if elected.⁹¹

The November general election brought the third and decisive break in the standoff when Roy Barnes was narrowly defeated in his re-election bid by the comparatively obscure Republican candidate, Sonny Perdue, effectively ending the battle over the use of bonds to pay for the transportation plan and likely the plan itself (Perdue promised during his campaign to let the plan die). Discussions about the fate of the road continued among opposition groups, but the momentum behind the Northern Arc, and most of the other ideas in Barnes's proposed plan, had clearly faded. Indeed, even before Barnes attempted to pull the plug on the road, there were signs that ARC was prepared to turn back any additional requests to allocate more money to fund acquisition of land for right of way.⁹² Growing opposition to the road among members of the Commission had imperiled other parts of the plan to the point that the entire program was in jeopardy, separate from the wider political fallout. Nevertheless, by early May of 2003, Governor Perdue had made it abundantly clear that he had no intention of implementing any of the projects or policies in Barnes's plan. Finally, in July 2003, six months after Barnes had left office and Perdue had publicly scrapped the plan, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that the former Governor's funding proposal had in fact been constitutionally permissible.⁹³

The alliances that formed across political lines to defeat the Northern Arc ended in a Pyrrhic victory, winning the immediate battle but mortally wounding the potential of longer-term gains in state support for regional (and local) planning. The surprisingly spirited Northern Arc Task Force ended up fracturing Barnes's efforts to further institutionalize regional planning within the state government, while also failing to present a viable alternative. The actions of the Task Force and their allies ended not only

in the defeat of the road and a radical regional transportation plan (though ironically not its innovative source of funding), but along with several other events spelled the effective end of the political career of the governor. Beneath the particular politics of the road fight lay a set of even more fundamental issues. As suburban homeowners allied with urban environmentalists to contest the Governor, the state, and the federal government, the battle turned into something more than just a fight over transportation infrastructure.

Barnes's defeat at the ballot box also ended the uninterrupted 130-year Democratic control of the state government, and drew to a close a line of progressive Governors in Georgia that could be dated back to Carl Sanders in the late 1960s. The battle of the Northern Arc challenged the viability of regional planning agencies, the right to control development policies, and the role of infrastructure projects in the politics of planning. But the Northern Arc also revealed much about how the Atlanta Regional Commission worked to maintain its role managing the planning process in the face of challenges to its authority. In the general context of the ongoing expansion of a vast, low-density Sunbelt metropolis, the fight over transportation planning spoke to visions of the future of the region, as newcomers in the suburbs finally realized enough power to begin the process of molding metropolitan politics in their image, which on the surface matched well with many of the issues of environmental activists.

¹ As a result of population growth and commuting patterns revealed in the 1990 Census of Population, the federal Office of Management and Budget expanded the official boundaries of the Atlanta MSA to 18 counties. For an overview of the OMB procedures for reclassification of counties during the 1990 Census, see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Supplementary Reports: Metropolitan Areas as Defined by the Office of Management and Budget*, June 30, 1993.

² See Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955 – 1985* (New York: Cambridge University, 1987) p73-76 & 83-86.

³ Georgia's 1989 growth management legislation was partly an attempt to address the connection between development patterns and water pollution.

⁴ See Hays, 1987, p5-7, 510

⁵ For an extended discussion and analysis of the process of regional transportation planning in the post-ISTEA period, see Judith Innes and Judy Gruber, "Bay Area Transportation Decision Making in the Wake of ISTEA," (Berkeley: University of California Transportation Center, 2000).

⁶ Ambient air quality is a measure of the relative concentration of widespread air pollutants that are considered harmful to public health and the environment. The 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act required EPA to establish National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The agency has identified seven different air pollutants that should be measured and regulated: Carbon Monoxide, Lead, Nitrogen Dioxide, Particulate Matter (2 types), Ozone, and Sulfur Oxides. For more detailed information, see Clean Air Act, 1990, Title 1, Part A, Section 109 and Title III, Section 302.

⁷ See Caro, *The Power Broker*, Chapter 34

⁸ Road building controversies in Atlanta have only occasionally been thoroughly documented, but informally include the building of a stretch of I-75/85 in the 1950s, I-485 (a proposed segment of the interstate system that would have cut through several neighborhoods east of downtown), the planning and building of the Presidential Parkway in the early 1980s (which connects the Carter Center to downtown), and the construction of Georgia 400 in the late 1980s (a toll road through the upscale Buckhead neighborhood). For brief mention of these controversies see Henderson, "Contesting the Spaces of the Automobile: The Politics of Mobility and the Sprawl Debate in Atlanta, Georgia," Chapter 4 and Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion*, Chapters 4 & 6. Only Ronald Bayor, in *Race and the Building of Twentieth Century Atlanta*, Chapter 3, discusses at length the controversy over the planning and construction of the downtown segments of I-75-85.

⁹ For details about different critiques of the practice and politics of planning, see Altshuler, *The City Planning Process: A Political Analysis*, Chapter 2; Herbert Gans, *People and Plans: Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions* (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Raymond Mohl, "Stop the Road: Freeway Revolts in American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (2004); Zachary Schrag, "The Freeway Fight in Washington, D.C.: The Three Sisters Bridge in Three Administrations," *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 5 (2004)

¹⁰ The history of Atlanta's post-war development has been written sporadically, with most work focused on the rise and fall of the central city. Relatively less has been said about the development of the broader region. For a sample of this work, see Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1953); Donald Deskins "Race as an Element in the Intra-city Regionalization of Atlanta's Population," *Southeastern Geographer* 11, no. 2 (1971); Dana White and Timothy Crimmins, "Urban Structure, Atlanta," *Journal of Urban History* 2, no. 2 (1976); Harold Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: a Chronicle of Its People and Events, Volume III* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1987); Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*; Bayor *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*; Keating *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion.*; Kruse *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism.*

¹¹ Popper, "Understanding American Land Use Regulation Since 1970," *Journal of the American Planning Association*; Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*; Massey and Denton *American Apartheid*; Sugrue *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*; Rome *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*; Self *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Post-war Oakland*; Hirsch *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960.*

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- ¹² As an aside, Los Angeles and Atlanta constructed their regional freeway systems during roughly the same period, but LA's network was more distributed, like a grid, while Atlanta's resembled a spoke-and-wheel. As the origins and destinations of trips changed over the years, crosstown mobility was severely compromised in Atlanta. Hence though both regions have come to represent paragons of automobility, LA's freeway network has helped maintain a much denser urban fabric. For more about the LA situation, see Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis*, p133-134.
- ¹³ "1946 Lochner Plan," CAUTION Collection, Box 51, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBLE), Emory University; "Expressways," Manuscript 619, Box 117, 1978, ARCC
- ¹⁴ The literature on travel behavior is vast. For a broad overview of issues related to travel behavior and road congestion, see Anthony Downs. 2004. *Still Stuck in Traffic: Coping with Peak Hour Traffic Congestion*. Washington: Brookings Institution.
- ¹⁵ For an overview of this phenomenon, see Robert Cervero, *America's Suburban Centers: the Land Use Transportation Link* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
- ¹⁶ *Atlanta Region Development Area Profile*, 1983, ARCC
- ¹⁷ *AJC*, March 24, 2002
- ¹⁸ Mule to Marta Collection, Box 1, Folder 7, "Metropolitan Planning Commission Preliminary Outline for a Local Transit Study," 1952; ARCC, "Now... For Tomorrow," Metropolitan Planning Commission, 1954, p16; ARCC, "Mapped Streets Fact Book: A Survey Concerning Right-of-Way Protection in Metro Atlanta," Metropolitan Planning Commission, November 1956
- ¹⁹ Douglas Bachtel, "An Analysis of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP) for the Georgia Department of Transportation," Georgia Department of Transportation, 1997
- ²⁰ ARCC, "Access to Central Atlanta," Metropolitan Planning Commission Report, 1959; ARCC, "Final Report: Evaluation of HUD-USDOT 1975-76 Atlanta Region Travel to Work Survey," by M. John Moskaluk and James Marks, March, 1980
- ²¹ *Outer Loop Study*, "Exhibit Three: Conformity Documentation Atlanta Regional Transportation Plan, 1987-2010," 1994, p4, ARCC; *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 7, 1991
- ²² Environmental Protection Agency, "History of the Clean Air Act," www.epa.gov
- ²³ For more discussion of various amendments to the Clean Air Act, see Samuel Hayes, 1987, p773-76
- ²⁴ The 1977 amendments set up a graduated scale into which counties would be slotted according to their levels of air pollution of ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter. The scale for each pollutant was slightly different, but all generally adhered to a system that ranged from 'Marginal' to 'Extreme,' with each step up the scale signifying a greater concentration of a particular pollutant. The values of each step were modified in 1990, but the steps remained in the same order. For more details and an example of how the categories work for measurements of ozone, see Clean Air Act, 1990, Part D, Subpart 2, Section 181.
- ²⁵ *AJC*, September 22, 1993. For background on the Clean Air Act amendments of 1977, see Currie "The Mobile Source Provisions of the Clean Air Act."
- ²⁶ The air quality categories ranged from Marginal to Extreme; Serious was the middle category.
- ²⁷ *AJC*, October 20, 1992
- ²⁸ *AJC*, July 22, 1992
- ²⁹ *AJC*, September 22, 1993; *AJC*, September 22, 1993; June 14, 1996; June 8, 1997. For background on the way the amendments were implemented, see Currie, "Relaxation of Implementation Plans Under the 1977 Clean Air Act Amendments."
- ³⁰ ARCC, *Outer Loop Study*, "The Outer Loop Background, March 25, 1994"
- ³¹ ARCC, *Outer Loop Study*, 1994
- ³² The Appalachian Regional Commission (another ARC), created by Congress in 1965, included 35 counties in north Georgia, several of which the Outer Loop would have passed through. An important part of the ARC program included funding economic development projects in Appalachian counties, and infrastructure (e.g. roads) was a popular target. At least part of the

Outer Loop would have been eligible for ARC funds, a fact that undoubtedly boosted the road's popularity among public officials.

³³ ARCC, *Outer Loop Study*, 1994

³⁴ *AJC*, October 6, 2002

³⁵ *AJC*, April 21, 1992; October 22, 1992

³⁶ *AJC*, December 8, 1994; October 12, 1986; *Atlanta Constitution*, August 12, 1971

³⁷ *Draft Regional Transportation Plan*, 1996, ARCC; *AJC*, June 19, 1994

³⁸ *AJC*, March 19, 1997

³⁹ ARCC, "Outer Loop Study and Summary of Focus Seminar," January 19, 1994; ARCC, "Meeting Minutes, November 23, 1994,"

⁴⁰ ARCC, *Outer Loop Study*, "The Outer Loop Background, March 25, 1994"; ARCC, "News Release," December 2, 1994

⁴¹ *AJC*, December 8, 1994

⁴² *AJC*, November 11, 1994

⁴³ Truman Hartshorn, *The Northern Arc: the Outer Perimeter Reincarnated?* (Atlanta: Research Atlanta, 2000)

⁴⁴ *AJC*, September 22, 1991

⁴⁵ *AJC*, September 22, 1993

⁴⁶ ARCC, *Outer Loop Study*, "Exhibit Three: Conformity Documentation Atlanta Regional Transportation Plan, 1987-2010," p1, 1994

⁴⁷ *AJC*, June 14, 1996

⁴⁸ *AJC*, December 30, 1996

⁴⁹ *AJC*, September 10, 1996

⁵⁰ These deliberations were unfolding in an environment of mutual blame over which organization was most responsible for the air quality predicament. See *AJC*, December 29, 1996

⁵¹ *AJC*, April 13, 1997; June 28, 1997

⁵² *AJC*, November 20, 1997; November 25, 1997

⁵³ The 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act opened several doors to lawsuits against government agencies when evidence could be presented that indicated government had failed to regulate according to the standards set forth in the legislation. See Clean Air Act, 1990, Title III, Section 304.

⁵⁴ *AJC*, December 20, 1997

⁵⁵ *AJC*, November 10, 1998

⁵⁶ January 21, 1999

⁵⁷ *AJC*, March 4, 1998; June 22, 1999

⁵⁸ *AJC*, September 13, 1999; December 2, 1999

⁵⁹ *AJC*, June 19, 1998

⁶⁰ *AJC*, October 27, 1998; November 7, 1998

⁶¹ *The Economist*, "United States: To Traffic Hell and Back," May 8, 1999; *Wall Street Journal*, December 2, 1999

⁶² *AJC*, March 28, 1999. This was also a technique employed in 1989, when the bills to create the Georgia Planning Act were put to a vote in the General Assembly.

⁶³ ARCC, "Workshop on Regionalism in Atlanta," May 17, 1985

⁶⁴ *AJC*, June 4, 1999

⁶⁵ *AJC*, March 28, 1999; January 26, 1999

⁶⁶ *AJC*, February 22, 1999; April 11, 1999; June 3, 1999; June 4, 1999

⁶⁷ *AJC*, June 16, 2000

⁶⁸ *AJC*, August 13, 1999; November 22, 1999; Accusations fly during late 1999 that ARC, GDOT and DNR underestimated the level of auto emissions in their calculations of future air quality.

⁶⁹ *AJC*, July 19, 2000

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- ⁷⁰ One week after the stay was granted, ARC submitted a revised, but older version of the regional transportation plan to USDOT and EPA, who agreed to approve the version because it was not affected by the court ruling. This older version included more stringent standards but extended the deadline for meeting the standards by two years. For details see *AJC*, July 19, 2000.
- ⁷¹ *AJC*, December 12, 2000
- ⁷² *AJC*, July 17, 2001; July 9, 2001; July 29, 2001; August 20, 2001
- ⁷³ Hartshorn, 2000
- ⁷⁴ *Official Code of Georgia Annotated, Title 32, Chapter 10*, “State Road and Tollway Authority,” 2007
- ⁷⁵ In 1995, the Federal Highway Administration expanded the number and type of debt financing mechanisms available to states in the process of funding transportation projects eligible for federal aid. Several states have used, or attempted to use, bonds that would be retired by using anticipated future federal highway funds (based on the yearly highway funding bill approved by Congress). Georgia was one of these states, and many of the projects in Barnes’ transportation plan would have been the first to attempt to use GARVEE bonds to expedite planning and construction. For a recent overview of the GARVEE program, see Federal Highway Administration, “Memorandum from Sandra Weisman regarding GARVEE Bond Guidance, March 25, 2004,” www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovativeFinance/garvee.htm.
- ⁷⁶ *AJC*, August 6, 2001
- ⁷⁷ *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, May 17, 2002.
- ⁷⁸ *AJC*, August 20, 2001
- ⁷⁹ *AJC*, July 3, 2001
- ⁸⁰ *AJC*, July 26, 2001
- ⁸¹ *AJC*, April 17, 2000; June 16, 2000; *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, February 8, 2002
- ⁸² *AJC*, July 11, 2002
- ⁸³ *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, May 3, 2002
- ⁸⁴ *AJC*, January 18, 2001; February 14, 2001; April 6, 2001; June 18, 2001; January 19, 2002
- ⁸⁵ *AJC*, July 2, 2002; August 13, 2002
- ⁸⁶ *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, February 8, 2002
- ⁸⁷ *AJC*, July 5, 2002
- ⁸⁸ *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, May 10, 2002; May 13, 2002; June 7, 2002; June 14, 2002; July 19, 2002
- ⁸⁹ *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, May 17, 2002
- ⁹⁰ *AJC*, September 4, 2002; August 20, 2002
- ⁹¹ *AJC*, August 13, 2002
- ⁹² *AJC*, July 11, 2002
- ⁹³ *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, February 18, 2003; *AJC*, May 14, 2003; June 29, 2001; July 1, 2003

Chapter 7

Conclusion

What Role ARC?

Three major questions drove this project. How have public regional planning agencies supported and extended the process of metropolitan decentralization? When does regional coordination happen? What role have regional agencies played in the expansion of federal and state power over land development? By looking across several decades of regional planning and through a series of major planning events in Atlanta, and specifically at the role played by the Atlanta Regional Commission during this period, I have hopefully offered a few answers, or at least the outlines of answers. Though complex and often overlapping, together the answers reflect the way that regional planning has functioned in Atlanta. All are ultimately tied together by the larger context of change that washed over American cities in the fifty-year period between the end of the Second World War and the end of the 20th century.

Four key issues help explain how the Atlanta Regional Commission worked to shape Atlanta's physical development, particularly during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s: administration, coordination, legacy, and the state. There are also several background issues, issues that help contextualize metropolitan Atlanta and that should not escape

mention: the relationship of water supply to land development, and the relationship of transportation planning to air quality.

First is the administrative role ARC played, a result of federal regulations that compelled the state legislature to establish the Commission, but also a result of state and local leadership, as well as the internal leadership of the Commission, pursuing a more active role for the Commission in the regional planning and development conversation than was otherwise required. By virtue of these circumstances, ARC quickly emerged as a key actor in structuring many of the major development plans and policies that allowed Atlanta to grow in its remarkably decentralized fashion. Whether amid crisis or conflict, central to ARC's ability to sustain itself was its intimate involvement in the complex network of regulations and politics that shaped development in the region, part of the larger processes that structure the metropolis and color the political battles that ensue. While the commission could not control the details of every development decision within the region, it did manage to both create and manipulate a variety of levers of power that affected those decisions. Most of the time, ARC operated outside of public view, and to some extent, even behind the view of the politicians who were supposed to be responsible for official decisions. ARC quietly maintained its administrative power by managing the pace of the planning process and by virtue of its status as the central forum for regional discourse. Serving as an information sorting facility for how control over the landscape would be divided between stakeholders was critical to the ability of the commission to maintain loose regional coordination. Controlling the process internalized divisions over the direction the region should take and turned back outside challenges to the existing planning agenda. In other words, ARC became a key part of a regional planning

apparatus that normalized certain planning and development patterns, creating a received wisdom that could support outward conflict and inward consensus without breaking.¹

The second issue pertains to how regional coordination in a place like metropolitan Atlanta should be understood. For a variety of reasons, development has been both better coordinated than usually recognized and political fragmentation (among different levels of government and among neighboring jurisdictions) has been less pronounced than often suggested. Though the context in which regional planning agencies operate is complex, subject to an impressive array of participants, agreement among parties within metro Atlanta remained fairly consistent across time. Connections and overlaps between members of ARC and the state legislature, the presence of a small bureaucratic corps, a group of local politicians deeply interested in the fate of the region, and comparatively large local jurisdictions made cross-border relationships easy to create and maintain. The agreements that ARC brokered helped manage the complicated character of regional planning, but also controlled bottom-up attempts (like the Northern Arc) to reform the regional planning process. As the long-term effects of sprawling development patterns have become more pronounced, the relationship of cities, suburbs, and exurbs has been transformed, bolstered by economic growth and a shifting population. The wider distribution of population necessitated the maintenance of political and economic relationships across political boundaries. Surface squabbles between suburbs and the central city shrouded a level of cooperation and consensus, in effect supporting expectations about how development would proceed. In each case highlighted here, broad consensus among participants was the norm rather than the exception.

Third is the weight of the legacy of regional planning in Atlanta, embodied in the uninterrupted line of successive regional agencies. Five decades of publicly supported regional planning lent stability to ARC, in terms of political acceptance, but five decades also revealed a slow process. The period over which regional planning unfolds raises questions about how and when regional plans should be evaluated. In the case of Atlanta, the process overwhelmed the plans, which meant that ideas often emerged and re-emerged several times before being implemented. Plans took years to develop and years to implement. Hence the moment that a plan is evaluated would directly influence whether it could be deemed a success or failure (or somewhere in between).

Fourth is the curious condition of state and local politics, Atlanta and Georgia emerging as places with surprisingly strong support of regional planning, albeit toward ends that do not necessarily correspond to widely held notions of good (or progressive) planning. ARC's wide involvement in different development issues over the years demonstrated how closely regional planning can become intertwined with state politics, even if the effect of the relationship is rapid, sprawling growth. This raises questions about how the models of regional planning that have become common parlance among planners, Portland and Minneapolis, have been developed and deployed. More often than not, the regional planning agencies and processes in these places have been identified as standards against which other places are gauged. Analysts identify details of the regional planning agendas in Portland and Minneapolis, then proceed to look for evidence of those details in other places. When they find nothing similar, they conclude that regional planning must not exist.

The case of Georgia and metropolitan Atlanta presents a stark contrast to this method: planning appears as a long-term process of accumulation and accommodation. Jimmy Carter's single term as Governor helped put into place an appreciation of the roles natural resource management and administrative reform could and should play in planning and growth management. When Joe Frank Harris assumed the governorship, he reinvigorated Carter's initiatives and added to them, leveraging water resource management as a key to making local and regional planning mandatory across the state. The controversial gubernatorial term of Roy Barnes highlighted the region's chronic transportation problems, but also pushed transportation to the forefront of the regional conversation and helped realize air quality as a regional development tool. Each of these alignments held important repercussions for regional planning, and how the influence of ARC's regional agenda has influenced political success or failure. The inescapable suggestion is not that Atlanta stands apart as a singular case, but rather that Atlanta presents a different kind of model of regional planning, one in which intergovernmental coordination and a consolidated regional leadership worked closely to support, extend, intellectualize, the production of a vastly sprawling urban landscape.

In many ways, each of the planning events highlighted here was part of the culmination of five decades of uninterrupted population and economic growth, which helped bring about a steady transfer of political control from rural areas to an amorphous urban district. All of this added up to the transformation of Atlanta, from a bounded city to an unbound metropolitan region.² As the years rolled by metro Atlanta grew consistently, both in terms of population and jobs, and the kinds of economic activities clustering in the region were less constrained by traditional locational anchors. Changes

in the national and global economy helped turn Atlanta into an important center of corporate headquarters and advanced business support activities, economic sectors that relied more on intellectual resources than proximity to raw materials. This helped change the kinds of in-migrants the region attracted, their origins, and in turn the kinds of secondary or non-base economy activities in demand (and the locations of those activities). As the central city became less dominant, the Atlanta region, like other urban places, was transformed into a complex web of residential and commercial space that rolled across the land.³

Beyond the substantive insights related to the work of ARC, two other storylines characterize the dominant ideology of planning and development in metropolitan Atlanta during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and might also characterize what happened throughout the country: one is a realization of a new environmental consciousness and the other is a reappraisal of the transportation planning process. Both storylines emerge from a tangle of state and federal policies that tended to alternate between concert and conflict. And both faced political conflict during long and convoluted episodes of implementation. Yet both also influenced the Atlanta Regional Commission, the processes of regional planning, and the state as a whole. The two ideologies traded off influence over time, but by the mid 1990s had begun to merge. Federal air and water quality legislation passed during the 1970s and 1980s provided a powerful new policy foundation for organizations interested in contesting planning and development practices, while the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act (CAA) and 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficient Act (ISTEA) made combating declining air quality a high profile national environmental issue with serious implications for transportation planning.

Environmental issues, particularly the preservation of water quality, riding a surge of popularity and federal interest in the early 1970s, formed a critical element of the nonconsecutive terms of Governors Jimmy Carter and Joe Frank Harris, who were both instrumental in turning natural resource protection into a potent political issue and in pushing comprehensive planning practices fomented in metro Atlanta out to the rest of the state. With the passage of the CAA amendments in 1990 and ISTEA in 1991, transportation re-emerged as the dominant concern in the region and state, and a particularly significant part of Roy Barnes' single term as Governor. Attempting to capitalize on the issue, Barnes tried to modernize Atlanta's transportation infrastructure and turn Atlanta's style of regional planning into a more prominent statewide issue.

Finally, two other concrete issues related to transportation and the environment (both related to infrastructure) form a backdrop against which planning in metro Atlanta happened, and both helped give the region its current shape. The first is that a single transport mode, the private automobile, held a position as the dominant design vehicle for transportation infrastructure.⁴ The second is the vast amount of money available to fund the expansion of water resource infrastructure effectively decoupled water supply from the pressure of population growth. Together, these conditions meant that the physical extent of urbanized areas was able to grow much faster than the population and, subsequently, the built environment sprawled outward at an incredible rate.

Among the things that the planning episodes presented here reveals is how the many masters (rules, regulations, people, organizations, governments) of regional planning each play a distinct role in the formation of the patterns of place, i.e. how and where people end up living. Only on a few occasions did observers of ARC and the

regional planning program in Atlanta grasp this.⁵ Yet the places that the planning process helps carve into the space of the metropolis provide a basic set of parameters, paths, and routes through which urban life courses.⁶ The bureaucratic and legal machinations around the creation of ARC, the 1975 Regional Development Plan, the Metropolitan Atlanta Water Resources Study, the Georgia Planning Act, and the air quality crisis/Northern Arc demonstrated how regional planning as practiced in Atlanta, filtered through environmental regulations and transportation policy, owes its origins to the intersection of federal, state, and regional institutions and interactions with local politics, all of which happens within typical everyday decisions about land use and development.⁷ Periodic opposition to the various plans and solutions proposed to deal with the region's problems can be read as both challenges to the existing balance of power that defines this interaction as well as confirmations of the ability of that balance to sustain itself in the face of conflict. The durability and potency of this balance of power suggests that public regional planning institutions represent something more than just a simple meeting among local governments to discuss the allocation of resources across urban space, that they are significant factors in the great network of intergovernmental relationships that help shape urban development.

As it has continued to grow, Metropolitan Atlanta has come to represent a future form of urban spatial development, in which a diffuse network of suburban/exurban relationships has replaced the familiar city-suburb dichotomy. Examining the details of the work of ARC and the state in this broader context will aid planners and local policy makers in their ability to understand the complex relationship between transportation, the environment, and land use, its function and role in the lives of individuals and in the

political struggles that structure the metropolis. Regional planning is an important component of the politics and policies driving metropolitan growth and change, but a part that has been mostly overlooked when researchers have sought explanations for how and why change happens. The combination of these factors portends an uncertain future for changing the way regions grow, particularly in sprawling Sunbelt cities. Given the mounting problems associated with sprawl, understanding how regional development actually functions is a subject of intense scholarly and practical interest.

Decentralization and Growth

During the last twenty years, beginning around the publication of Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* and Robert Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias*, a growing collection of metropolitan scholars have argued that in the second half of the 20th century a close relationship between the federal government and key industrial sectors lured a wide swath of households to the urban fringe, a movement that simultaneously forced many older central cities into a state of decline. The commingling of inexpensive land, a preference for single-family dwellings in a pastoral setting, racism, and global economic restructuring speeded the process along.⁸

Supporting this era of intensive suburban-ward population movement was the changing geographic focus of the federal government's expenditures. Beginning during the Second World War, and intensifying in the years immediately afterward, the government directed a series of major defense related investments in infrastructure toward Sunbelt states.⁹ Expanded military installations (e.g. North Island, Eglin, Dobbins), research and development labs (e.g. Oak Ridge, Los Alamos, CDC), and

related support facilities (e.g. NASA) were scattered across the southern half of the U.S., with particular concentrations in California, Texas, Georgia, and Florida. These investments kick-started local Sunbelt economies, spawned an array of start-up firms, laid the groundwork for a new professional workforce, and attracted a large number of domestic migrants.¹⁰ The combination of federal dollars, cheap labor, and opportunities for expanding into new markets attracted branches of manufacturing firms based in the Northeast and Midwest, and much later the corporate headquarters themselves.¹¹ The confluence of these two sets of distinct but related processes created a national pattern of decentralization of people, housing, and jobs, from small lots and small houses in dense Northern cities to large lots and large houses in sprawling Southern suburbs. This marked the beginning of the relocation of the nation's political heart from the big cities of the North to the broad suburban metropolitan areas of the South.

The role of ARC and its predecessors as key institutional supports for regional planning in many ways exemplifies how broader socio-economic processes converged in metropolitan Atlanta and has had important implications for the development of its built environment. Beginning in the 1940s, Atlanta started down a long trajectory of growth.¹² Fueled by a robust local economy and mild climate, the region sustained a long-term, low-level development explosion. During this period, metro Atlanta grew from 1.5 million residents spread over 15 counties in 1970 to 4.1 million people in 28 counties.¹³ Yet unlike urbanization in the decades before the Second World War, the central city captured very little of the influx. Most newcomers moved directly to the suburbs. Migrants who originated in smaller towns in the South and metropolitan counties in the Northeast and Midwest drove the early years of growth, but since the late

1980s the volume of international immigrants has increased as thousands of newcomers have begun arriving from Latin America and South and East Asia.¹⁴

Over the same period, the role of both roads and the natural environment in the social and economic life of the country changed considerably. Roads were transformed from chaotic public spaces for communal life to engines of economic development to vast movement spaces reserved for the sole purpose of getting as much motor traffic as possible toward its destination.¹⁵ The environment went from a wild expanse for human exploitation to a collection of places that should be understood for their inherent value and indefinitely protected to part of a complex ecological space that humans have a responsibility to sustain. As roads became single-purpose facilities devoted exclusively to motorized vehicles, detached dwellings with yards gathered many of the old public functions of city streets into the private confines of the domestic sphere. And as the natural environment was visibly impacted by the proliferation of single-family houses and private yards, a reaction arose that questioned the processes that had led to the suburban landscape in the first place. This reaction would later be understood as the first sign of an impending shift in toward a more positive valuation of development planning.

That Atlanta's growth occurred almost completely in the unincorporated sections of a vast suburban/exurban fringe, particularly in the counties north of the city, made for a challenging governing environment.¹⁶ In a region with only a handful of small cities and no townships, the county governments were responsible for providing a full array of urban services to very large areas, which often proved difficult. The resulting style of governance could be described as necessarily loose. This was both advantageous and detrimental to ARC's efforts. While the number of governments under its jurisdiction

was limited, making coordination among neighbors easier, those governments often used a very light touch when it came to interfering with or restricting land development within their own boundaries.

Yet such development was supported by substantial public investments in road and water infrastructure, orchestrated by the federal government, ARC and the state, but implemented by county governments. With a permanent funding source written into the constitution, road building, a result of the combined efforts ARC, the state legislature, the Governor, and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), has consumed a significant portion of total state expenditures over the last thirty years. In line with many other Southern states, road building in Georgia, including Metro Atlanta, has been pursued under the auspices of general economic development, whereby roads are built or expanded with the express purpose of attracting investment.¹⁷ After the 1972 Clean Water Act, a significant expansion of the region's wastewater treatment and surface water extraction capacity opened the way for more intensive residential and commercial development. The result is an great collection of roadways, sewers, and water lines that knit together an amorphous expanse of private, single-use, excessively manicured development pockets, a pastiche of low-density residential subdivisions and retail power centers. The speed with which this landscape has grown puts Atlanta at the leading edge of U.S. development patterns, emblematic of sprawl and automobility.¹⁸

As the low-density, auto-centered landscape became ubiquitous, and even worked to retrofit existing central cities, an extended discussion emerged about its problems. The perceived failure of planning and development regulations put in place in the 1970s and 1980s (intended to deal with the damage created by the processes that created this

landscape), bolstered by mounting evidence of ecological damage, along with increased congestion brought by population and job growth, sparked an elevation in the discussion of the spatial, and implicitly political, future of the region. Led by an increasingly diverse group of actors, the forces that drove metropolitan growth over the last three decades have been contested in a variety of arenas.¹⁹ Critical to understanding how these efforts unfolded are the political attitudes that have grown up in the midst of so much metropolitan change. Though many businesses, households, and individuals benefited enormously from federal, state, and regional policies that encouraged and supported urban decentralization, everyone, in some way or another, has come to see the procession of the sprawling landscape as problematic.²⁰ Homeowners, environmentalists, and other social activists have become preoccupied with the environmental problems created by an urban fringe that seems to continually expand deeper into the countryside. Many of the same homeowners (or their neighbors), joined by politicians and land interests, have also been preoccupied with the growing congestion on urban roads and a perceived transportation crisis.²¹ Business interests have struggled to reconcile themselves to one side or the other, while confronting a new social and economic complexity that has undercut their ability to influence the direction the region should take. Planners and other members of the public bureaucracy, ostensibly neutral players, occupy a crucial central role in the process because of their role as knowledge and information brokers. Though the varying and often changing positions these groups took made the process of creating the metropolitan landscape the appearance of being uncoordinated, it was just as much an orchestrated effort that reflected a more-or-less agreed upon vision of urban development.²²

The heart of both the consensus and conflict over planning the development of metropolitan Atlanta has involved a seemingly mundane and incremental tangle of issues related to the constantly shifting point of confluence between transportation and environmental planning regulations.²³ Deciding where to build roads or where trains should run and negotiating how natural resources should be used (or protected) are among the most important and politically charged moments in the development process. These decisions result from the interaction and conflict of a huge array of different stakeholders, and together comprise the very concrete practice and politics of urban planning.

Triumph of the GOP

The defeat of Roy Barnes and the state's Democratic leadership in the autumn of 2002 signaled perhaps more than a simple election loss: it was also the end of a governing coalition that had held sway over state politics for almost thirty years. Barnes' loss ended the rise of a state politician who not only understood the details of regional planning, but also put efforts to transform it at the center of his public persona. With Barnes being booted from office, was the possibility of another transformation of the state of regional planning in metropolitan Atlanta pushed back underground, and along with it an urgent public discourse about the future of the region? In other words, was 2002 a watershed year for regional planning in Atlanta? On the surface, the regional planning situation in metropolitan Atlanta changed in the aftermath of the 2002

Gubernatorial election. The GOP assumed the reins of power in the state, taking over not only the Governor's Mansion but both of branches of the General Assembly as well.

The new Republican Governor, Sonny Perdue, took an initial stance toward the array of organizations and stakeholders that had proposed measures to put the brakes on sprawl that pushed them off center stage. Tightening development regulations, changing the terms of coordination among local governments, creating a different role for regional planning, and providing desperately needed investments in transportation infrastructure (especially mass transit) were, at least temporarily, removed from the front burner. The Republican leadership acted quickly to stamp out the smoldering remains of the state's last Democratic administration, putting a halt to all immediate plans for building major new transportation infrastructure and deeming the GARVEE bonding plan outside the bounds of further consideration. Early in his term, Perdue replaced the GRTA board with his own supporters (including one of the suburban leaders of the Northern Arc Task Force), effectively squelching the agency's remaining authority. Change in the Presidential administration in 2000 had brought an expected relaxation of EPA's air quality rules, which took some of the pressure off ARC to immediately deal with the region's lingering air quality issues. With the shelving of the GARVEE bond program, the commitment of the state's principle leadership to pushing any of the major transportation projects Barnes had proposed was clearly waning. While the new power balance tilted more politically conservative than the one it replaced, and though at times it appears divorced from urban issues, deep connections among the region's political jurisdictions meant that concern over controlling the regional planning and development agenda would not soon wane, even if party affiliations changed.²⁴

Hence in other respects, the planning situation stayed the same. The lawsuits filed against ARC and the state had largely been settled or dismissed, meaning ARC could continue with the regional transportation planning program that it had already put into place. And the full effects of ISTEA and subsequent federal transportation bills, TEA-21 and SAFETEA, provided critical financial and administrative support to ARC as it went about its work. Thus as a result of its own resources and bureaucratic inertia, the commission continued to go about the regular business of regional planning, just outside the state's changing political leadership. Yet congestion on the region's roads continued to build, and federal money for capacity adding projects remained scarce. Both conditions were likely to continue for the foreseeable future).

These factors helped provide footing for ARC to introduce a new program in Atlanta in 2000 designed to support targeted densification nodes around the region, a program that ended up producing several resounding success stories. The plan worked by building on the pre-existing infrastructure contained within the constellation of small town centers and mass transit stations that had been absorbed into the urban fold as the metropolitan area had expanded. Providing substantial initial funds for planning activities, and then follow up funds to pay for infrastructure that would support realization of the objectives of the plans, the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) provided a glimmer of possible changes within the region's massive sprawl. Efforts in suburbs far from the central city to induce the mixing of land uses, denser residential development, and build pedestrian-oriented infrastructure, issues that had never really been prioritized before, began to spread. In 2000, the LCI program was authorized for \$5 million for five years to support the development of plans and another \$350 million for construction

funds, no small achievement and one that garnered national attention. As a result of the program's popularity and success, in 2005 another \$5 million in planning funds and \$150 million for construction were set aside. By 2003, \$132 million of the construction funds had been programmed for LCI related projects.²⁵

And in spite of the hiccup created by the abandonment of Barnes' transportation proposals, a new effort emerged, after Perdue had settled into office, to find another way to fund some of the key, long-term elements most observers and many leaders still believed were desperately needed. The ideas of building a new commuter rail system and expanding the existing mass transit system remained potent, and continued to garner relatively high levels of support among the chamber of commerce crowd, planners, a number of Atlanta legislators, as well as the public. With the state and federal government unable or unwilling to put up the money needed to pay for so much new infrastructure, a plan for allowing groups of counties to band together for the purposes of creating special local taxes for infrastructure development was introduced in the General Assembly in 2008. While the measure failed to pass, supporters have gone back to the drawing board with plans to reintroduce a modified version of the legislation in 2009.²⁶

In the mean time, the Atlanta MSA has continued to expand, both in breadth and in numbers. By early 2006, the Census Bureau estimated the region's population at just over five million, a substantial (25%) increase since 2000. In the same year, ARC's in house estimate put the population of its ten-county planning area at just over four million. While most of this growth, as in the previous forty years, landed in unincorporated suburbs, four things are worth pointing out about the characteristics of the new comers and the collective effect those changes were having. One, the city of Atlanta saw a

dramatic turn around beginning in the mid-1990s, as the city began to net population for the first time since the 1950s. The majority of these newcomers were white and highly educated, signaling what could become a major shift in the city's politics sometime during the next decade. Two, suburban growth was beginning to be spread more evenly around the region, with counties to the south of the city showing surges in population. Three, the relative diversity of the newcomers had changed substantially. While blacks and whites still comprised the majority of in-migrants, the number of non-US born immigrants increased manifold. By the end of 2005, there were nearly 500,000 Latinos in the region, a seven-fold increase from 1990, and just over 200,000 Asians, a four-fold increase. Almost all of these immigrants landed in the suburbs, often far from the central city. Four, the overall concentration of the region's population in the core urban counties remained strong, though what would be considered the central urbanized area had expanded considerably. The total population in Cobb, Gwinnett, Dekalb, Clayton, and Fulton counties comprised 65% of the population of the entire MSA, while the ten counties within ARC's jurisdiction held over 75% of the MSA population. Most new growth has continued to locate in unincorporated parts of those counties.²⁷

At some moments, the region looks poised for another major burst of infrastructure building and another expansion of development regulations. If the regional economy is to continue to grow, or at least prosper, the problems of water and transportation simply cannot go unaddressed. While the GOP leadership initially punted on its responsibility, the urgency of the situation will not wait for political squabbles to be settled. More than ever, the fate of the state's economy depends on metropolitan Atlanta. In the absence of a change in federal policy, a commitment by the state to significant

investment in new transit infrastructure could help alleviate congestion and improve air quality, as well as support a shift in both settlement and movement patterns within the region. Adopting a more aggressive regional water management program could prevent another episode of the summer drought of 2007, when prevailing weather conditions (i.e. lack of rain) nearly ran the region's water supply systems dry. With what appears to be a resurgence of the central city population already underway, the intended effect of such policy changes, a denser population and smaller regional footprint, may happen sooner than expected. Yet the problems of a sprawling region are in the process of being compounded by factors outside local or state (or even national) control. The rising cost of petroleum coupled with an automobile-dependent metropolis could translate into serious hardship for a majority of Atlanta's inhabitants. Without concerted effort, this could mean a downturn in quality of life and economic vitality. What comes about will depend on the ability of every level of government and every organization with a stake in the region to learn to cooperate better.

This raises important questions about the nature of urban counties as governing bodies, the motivation for state support, and the influence of the planning bureaucracy. The relative power of Georgia's urban counties, coupled with their size, made them both difficult to govern and particularly vulnerable to the influence of special interests (especially land developers). This is something no one really talks about, yet the organization of local government maintains a close relationship to the built environment. Ergo, is the pro-development environment actually a function of lack of fragmentation?

¹ Attempting to characterize the writings of Michel Foucault in a single paragraph would be unfair. But Foucault, over the course of many years, developed distinct ideas about the way power and institutions work in modern life. These ideas were perhaps most fully developed in *Discipline and Punish*, where Foucault argues that a “micro-physics of power” characterizes the way modern institutions normalize their position through small tactics, in activities like counting and mapping, that the authority of these institutions is not owned by an individual, but is instead transmitted by those with authority just as much as those who are subjects. Among the lectures and interviews contained in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault elaborates and explains his ideas about modern expressions of power, extending them to consider the problem of the history of spaces, “from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat,” which is to say an examination of space as a subject and expression of power. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

² Borrowed term from Robert Fishman, “Metropolis Unbound: the New City of the Twentieth Century,” *Flux* 1, (1990)

³ Henri Lefebvre, in *The Urban Revolution*, suggests that the transition from the industrial city to the urban city entails a transformation of social, economic, and political concern from the production and management of goods or things, separate inanimate objects, to the production and management of space. Drawing a line that begins with the establishment of agricultural production and ends with what he calls “the urban problematic,” Lefebvre works through the meaning of this latest phase in the evolution of human settlements. His excavation argues that the concept of the bounded city no longer adequately captures the scale and complexity of life, that the totality of human life has been subsumed by the unfolding experiences of urban development, “which becomes a productive force”. The essential feature of “the urban” is not “as an accomplished reality... but... as a horizon,” therefore it is the “analyst’s responsibility to identify and describe the various forms of urbanization and explain what happens to the forms, functions, and urban structures that are transformed by... the process of generalized urbanization.” See Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1970) p15-17.

⁴ Raymond Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge: MIT, 1975); Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*

⁵ *AJC*, May 7, 2000; May 14, 2000. Editorial columns by Jim Wooten highlighted the hidden role of the federal, state, and regional planning bureaucracy in determining how GRTA would regulate development.

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

⁷ John Rae, *The Road and the Car in American Life* (Cambridge: MIT, 1970); Robert Cervero, *America’s Suburban Centers: The Land Use – Transportation Link* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Martin Wachs and Margaret Crawford, ed., *The Car and The City* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992); McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*; Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Urry, “The ‘System’ of Automobility”

⁸ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*

⁹ Tabb, “Urban Development and Regional Restructuring, an Overview”; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development and the Transformation of the South 1938 – 1980*; Ann Markusen, Peter Hall, Scott Campbell, and Sabrina Dietrick, *The Rise of the Gunbelt: the Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University, 1991)

¹⁰ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*

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- ¹¹ *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, April 16, 2007
- ¹² David Goldfield, *Cotton fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982)
- ¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2003
- ¹⁴ Ruthheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: the Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*
- ¹⁵ McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: the Automobile and the American City*
- ¹⁶ After 1951, Georgia law restrained large-scale annexations, which meant that Atlanta did grow its boundaries like most other Sunbelt cities. See David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993).
- ¹⁷ See Terence Rephann, "Highway Investment and Regional Economic Development: Decision Methods and Empirical Foundations," *Urban Studies* 30, no. 2 (1993).
- ¹⁸ Koolhaas, "Atlanta: a Reading," *Atlanta*; Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck, *Nation: the Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*; Urry, "The 'System' of Automobility"
- ¹⁹ Mohl, "The Interstates and the Cities: Highways, Housing, and the Freeway Revolt"
- ²⁰ Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States since 1945*; Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*
- ²¹ Blake *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape*; Pisarski, *Commuting in America : a national report on commuting patterns and trends*; Pisarski, *Commuting in America II: the second national report on commuting patterns and trends*; Dittmar, "A Broader Context for Transportation Planning: Not Just an End In Itself"; Putnam, *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*
- ²² Here Foucault emerges again for his insight into the ways that power (as knowledge) functions through control of region and domain and organization of boundaries: "There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region, and territory." See Foucault, "Questions on Geography," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, p69.
- ²³ Henderson, "Contesting the Spaces of the Automobile: The Politics of Mobility and the Sprawl Debate in Atlanta, Georgia"
- ²⁴ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: the Origins of the New American Right*
- ²⁵ Atlanta Regional Commission, "Community Design and Smart Growth: the LCI Experience," presentation to 7th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, February 2008
- ²⁶ *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 23, 2007; March 6, 2008
- ²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006

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