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"A Must for Atlanta's Future": Metropolitan Atlanta and the Rapid Transit Idea, 1963–65

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Introduction

The idea of building a rapid transit system in Atlanta was long thought to be too ambitious. However, in 1964, when Atlanta mayor Ivan Allen Jr. took the call from Georgia congressman Charles L. Weltner, who was a member of the House Banking and Currency Committee, Allen learned that Washington was preparing "a measure . . . to provide for design money [for rapid transit], and that Atlanta had better do something for it" if they wished to realize the dream of rapid transit. Allen replied, "My God, is that thing really going to pass?" His comment was hardly unusual, since, according to Weltner's recollection, "nobody [in Atlanta] much thought about it [rapid transit] at the time."[1]

The rumor of a national bill appeared less than a decade after Atlanta's urban planners declared their interest in rapid transit, but few, including Allen, believed that Uncle Sam would actually take a hand in the construction or operation of local mass transit. In the era of John F. Kennedy's New Frontier, however, the prospect of federal funding was no longer merely a dream. As the first urban Democrat in the White House since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, JFK was willing to provide national assistance for cities to restore or create their own mass transit systems.[2]

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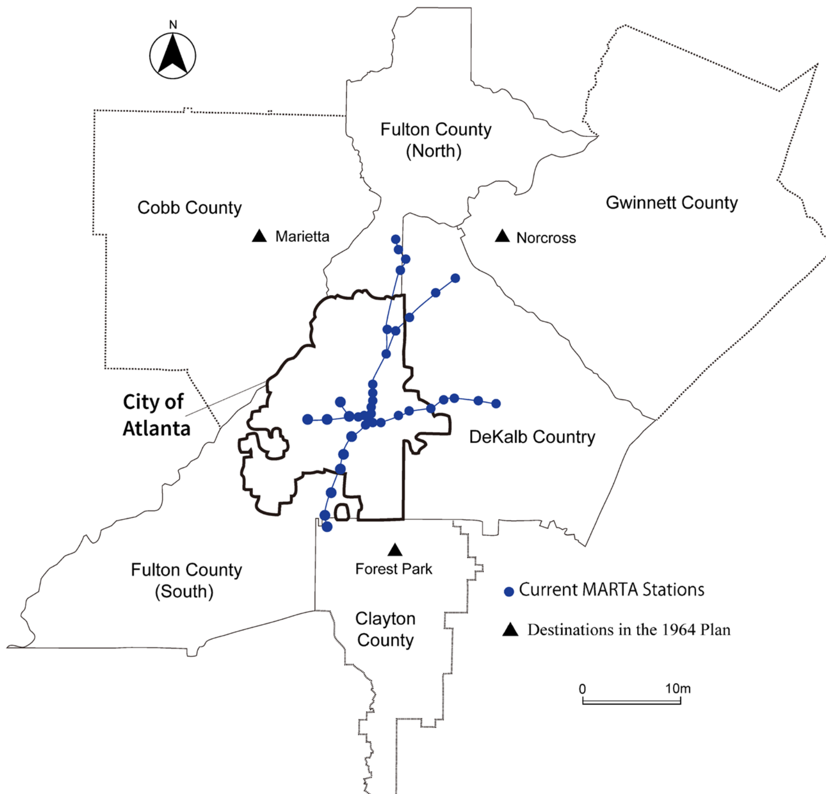
Following Kennedy's assassination, his successor, Lyndon Johnson, finally signed the Urban Mass Transportation Act (hereafter UMTA) of 1964, which provided federal matching grants to design, build, or improve rapid transit systems. Atlanta was one of the cities that welcomed such legislation.

At that point, Atlanta's publicly funded, pro-rapid transit group gained new momentum. To bring such a system to Atlanta, the advocates of rapid transit in Georgia had to make the case for the necessity of rapid transit in Atlanta, which they proceeded to do in a series of congressional hearings on the mass transit bill. At the same time, they tried to persuade state lawmakers, who had long disdained federal support for a series of civil rights bills, to change their minds and welcome the federal rapid transit bill. In addition, they had to convince state politicians and, more important, citizens to support a legal environment that would make Atlanta eligible for the installation of a rapid transit system. In short, the construction of a rapid transit system in such a short period of time was impossible without forging a favorable consensus toward it among politicians in Congress, lawmakers in Georgia, and, of course, the public.

In this article I investigate how Atlanta's advocates of rapid transit used the idea of transportation technology and argue that the new mode of mobility technology they promoted created an imagined community in an age of urban disintegration, one that culminated in white flight and a consequent decline in inner cities. In particular, I examine the effort by champions of rapid transit to persuade Georgia lawmakers—senators and congressmen—to back the passage of the UMTA of 1964 and to educate the public to support passage of Amendment 16 to the state constitution in November 1964, which enabled the state of Georgia to set up a "public transit corporation" that could receive federal grants and plan the construction of the sixty-six-mile rail transit covering five counties in metropolitan Atlanta.

The objective of this essay is to suggest the possibility that the bold efforts of public transit advocates to meet this challenge fell short of creating an inclusive public transit system. Their attempt to make a transit system connecting the heart of the city of Atlanta to suburban counties was eminently rational, and, indeed, Atlanta was successful in setting up the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (hereafter MARTA) in 1965; but subsequent referenda regarding the county's participation, financing, routing, and construction plans limited the reach of its innovative sixty-six-mile rail system, which ended up being restricted to the two central counties—Fulton and DeKalb—in which the city of Atlanta was located.

The three suburban counties of Cobb, Clayton, and Gwinnett, then in the metropolitan area, voted not to join the system in 1965 and 1971; therefore, the actual route does not extend to those three counties. (See map.) As much research and many reports have shown, the refusal of these three (at the time) white-majority counties to join the system was the result of three deeply intertwined factors: racism, antitax sentiment, and dislike for increasing federal intervention in local affairs.[3] In this article I look at these first attempts in the early sixties, especially from 1963 to 1964, and examine the reasons why they overshadowed the future development of an equitable public transit network. I do so by illuminating the ways in which the rapid transit advocates advertised the original plan by creating a narrative persuasive enough to get support from the majority of the residents to legalize a rapid transit system. I argue that, despite success



Map Current MARTA Stations in the 1965 Metropolitan Atlanta Counties

in eliciting this support, the seeds of the eventual failure to create a metropolitan community using a new mode of transportation were planted because the boosters did not address the demands of the people but, instead, prioritized their own vision rather than solving the racial and class divisions in their city.

The essay charts the development of the advocates' efforts to obtain federal assistance for rapid transit. First, I attempt to uncover the ways in which Atlanta's pro-rapid transit faction continued their endeavors by forming such organizations as the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Committee of 100 (hereafter the Committee of 100). I then examine how the boosters chose Georgia's former governor, S. Ernest Vandiver Jr., as chairman of the organization and how their choice proved successful in (1) persuading Georgia lawmakers to support the federal act encouraging rapid transit and (2) achieving the ratification of state constitutional Amendment 16 in a statewide election, which enabled five metropolitan counties to have a public transit authority. Finally, I examine the limit of the idea of unity and its legacy to the future development of metropolitan Atlanta's public transit system.

Ernest Vandiver and the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Committee of 100

Beginning in the late 1950s, Atlanta's rapid transit advocates—the majority of whom were chamber of commerce–type boosters desiring federal investment and more development in general—worked diligently to bring such a system to the state capitol. Those who supported installing a rapid transit system faced many difficulties. First and foremost was that the idea was not a favorite of Democratic politicians in Georgia, most of whom represented rural Georgia and had difficulty accepting the unprecedented rise of urban interests—particularly Atlanta's; thus, it was necessary for the rapid transit supporters to find a person who was able to connect members of Atlanta's business community to those rural Georgians who disfavored the focus on urban interests. In November 1962, the advocates had already tried to enact "amendment No. 9" in the general election, a measure aimed at providing the Georgia General Assembly with the authority to have the counties "build and operate public transportation systems." Rural counties, however, including suburban Cobb County in metropolitan Atlanta, did not approve the amendment and thus it failed.[4]

Following this turn of events, in 1963, the research organization

Metropolitan Atlanta Transit Study Committee formed what came to be known as the Committee of 100. Comprising "representatives of Atlanta and the five counties," the committee's objective was to "carry out an extensive informational and promotional program to expedite the installation of some form of rapid transit to serve our metropolitan area."[5] Therefore, when exercising his authority to appoint members of the Committee of 100, Atlanta's mayor Ivan Allen Jr., who was a former president of Atlanta's chamber of commerce, took great care in considering who would serve as the leader.[6] He ultimately chose S. Ernest Vandiver Jr., who had only just completed his governorship of the state.[7]

Vandiver's affinity for the business and financial community in Atlanta made him the best candidate for leading the rapid transit educational campaign. But this was not the only reason for the decision. Despite his urban and refined image, Vandiver, originally from rural Franklin County, still represented the voices of the rural South that demanded the preservation of the so-called Southern way of life through a blending of the "old" and the "new."[8]

Vandiver's closeness to the "old" implied tolerance of traditional racial thinking, and it was expected that this ambiguity in his attitude on racial matters would go a long way in eliciting rural support. Although Vandiver is remembered for ending school segregation in Georgia, he did not accept this change out of personal conviction. Rather, his motivation in permitting desegregation was that Atlanta's business elites desired it. From the point of view of the business community, to close schools in order to resist the federal order to desegregate was simply unacceptable; the business community believed, in the words of one historian, that "such action would be disastrous for their city's economic future."[9]

Moreover, this happened when Atlanta business leaders were happily welcoming the end of the county unit system that they viewed as detrimental to Atlanta's economic progress.[10] This was because the system gave more political power to the less-populated rural counties, which urban business interests found to be unreasonable because cities, particularly Atlanta, were underrepresented in the general assembly. The end of the county unit system, as a consequence of the Baker v. Carr decision in 1962, both symbolized the ascendance of the state's—and especially Atlanta's—urban business elite and ensured that this ascendance would be more than symbolic.[11] Ironically, Vandiver happened to be the last governor chosen in the county unit system, yet he accomplished this while forging close ties with Atlanta's business elites. On March 5, 1963, when the Atlanta mayor

solicited Vandiver to assume the chairmanship of the Committee of 100 to carry out "an extensive informational and promotional program" for rapid transit, the former governor pleased Allen by quickly responding that it would be his "privilege" to work on this "very important matter."[12]

The Contribution of the Georgia Congressional Delegation to the Urban Mass Transit Act of 1964

Indeed, as soon as Vandiver accepted the Committee of 100's chairmanship, the former governor started working toward that objective. On April 1, 1963, he telegrammed his uncle-in-law, Richard Russell, who was the chairman of the US Senate's Southern Caucus, and Herman Talmadge, son of the segregationist Eugene Talmadge, and urged the two senators and staunch southern Democrats to "support . . . rapid transit as a must for Atlanta's future."[13]

Vandiver's effort was successful. The bill passed the Senate on April 4, 1963, by a vote of 52 to 41. Russell admitted his eventual support for the bill was a consequence of the strong push from Vandiver and Atlanta mayor Ivan Allen Jr. According to Russell, Vandiver and Allen "presented it [the bill] forcefully to me this time," leading him to think that the traffic problem "was probably practically incapable of solution without some federal assistance."[14] This was a significant development. Talmadge and Russell were not expected to favor the bill for the very reason that it allowed for more governmental spending and hence an increase of federal control in Georgia. Neither of these was desirable in their view, especially the latter, for the Kennedy administration was just then preparing the Civil Rights Act. The Georgia senators feared and fervently opposed federal intervention with regard to racial segregation in the South; indeed, only 1 of 22 senators from the South endorsed the Civil Rights Act in 1963. Nevertheless, 10 out of 22 senators from the eleven Southern states voted for the UMTA in 1963.[15]

Despite Talmadge and Russell's endorsement, the bill encountered difficulties in the House, where congressmen from rural counties in Georgia opposed the bill. As soon as voting in the House was announced, in April 1964, Vandiver urged Georgia's members to vote for it. For instance, in his letter to five such representatives, he encouraged them to seriously consider the bill, but not all responses were favorable, and rural congressmen continued expressing doubts about the bill. For example, one lawmaker representing rural countries said he was "not sure what is going to be

done" with this act.[16] To make matters worse, the Area Redevelopment Act, despite the then president Kennedy having strongly favored the bill, was defeated in the House by a margin of only five votes (209 to 204). That bill had been prepared to help solve urban poverty, an issue that resurrected an old political alliance of those united against an expansion of federal power. This failure foreshadowed the fate of smooth enactment of the urban mass transit legislation.

The worries of the rapid transit supporters, however, ended up being unnecessary. When the UMTA bill's vote was finally scheduled for floor action on June 24, advocates urged Vandiver to come up to Washington and join in last-minute lobbying activities.[17] His efforts appear to have helped, for the long-stalled bill was finally approved by a close vote of 212 to 189 on June 26, 1964.[18] President Johnson then signed the bill and declared that big cities should "no longer be a stepchild . . . neglected by their government in Washington."[19] Atlanta congressman Charles L. Weltner, an ardent supporter of civil rights legislation, certainly believed so and expressed his gratitude to Vandiver for his interest and work in support of the bill, writing that "our 'win' and that Georgia delegation's vote are certainly the result of your leadership of the Committee of 100 and your personal concern."[20] The chairperson of the Committee of 100 thus played a vital role in passing the UMTA bill that would eventually authorize federal matching grants for two-thirds of public transportation costs throughout the nation.

To Win National and International Competitions: Persuading the Public

It should be noted that to get support from Southern Democrats, Vandiver and the Committee of 100 members had to build a narrative that presented rapid transit as something extremely beneficial to the economy of the state of Georgia. In the case of senators Russell and Talmadge, Vandiver contended that current traffic congestion "chokes our city, [and] postpones the time when workers in the eighteen-county area depending on the central city are denied easy access to the jobs and convenience markers on which they depend." Solving the problem, he continued, would be "extremely difficult . . . without federal assistance."[21] In the case of the House, knowing that three of the congressmen were from outside the metropolitan Atlanta area, he emphasized Atlanta's responsibility for the development of Georgia's overall welfare, arguing that "people from 29 counties in

Georgia come to work in the Atlanta metropolitan area," and it "represents 43 percent of the state's population, so you can see how much good this would bring to the State of Georgia."[22] Clearly, when making their case in Washington, the advocates did not view rapid transit as a means of promoting of social mobility inside the metro area; for them, it was a precondition for future economic growth.

While persuading lawmakers in Washington, the Committee of 100 was also appealing to the citizens in Greater Atlanta. Of course, the way they won the support from Southern Democrats appeared in newspapers and thereby constituted a strong public appeal for rapid transit. Simultaneously, however, the champions of mass transit had to explain how this rapid transportation system would improve life for people in metropolitan Atlanta. Indeed, they still had a long way to go if they wished to see ground broken on a rapid transit construction in the city. To begin with, the committee members had to have Amendment 16 added to the Georgia State Constitution, and they had not forgotten their bitter experience in 1962, when a similar statewide referendum failed to pass. The *Atlanta Journal* attributed this previous defeat to "public apathy," and supporters did not intend to repeat their failure to rally public enthusiasm.[23]

After—or even before—Vandiver and others succeeded in passing the federal bill, the objective of the advocates and the Committee of 100 was now to "educate" Atlanta citizens and citizens all over the state and secure their vote for the amendment.[24] Even before Vandiver and others succeeded in attaining passage of the federal bill, they already understood the need to "educate" metropolitan Atlanta citizens about the benefits of voting for the amendment. In other words, they had to first highlight the problems that currently plagued metropolitan Atlanta and then illustrate how rapid transit would resolve them and pave the way to building a new community best suited for life in an age of urban expansion.

The Committee of 100 hired the public relations consulting firm Infoplan, and the company proceeded to set up an education program to help prepare speeches and produced a documentary film. All these efforts were directed toward the immediate objective of winning public support for passage of Amendment 16.[25] The amendment would "authorize the General Assembly to create a 'public corporation or authority'" that would "empower" the counties of metropolitan Atlanta to "finance, develop and operate the $300 million rapid transit system which has been proposed for the community."[26]

The new referendum should not be as difficult as the challenge in 1962,

for the advocates only had to win a majority in Atlanta's five metropolitan counties—at that time Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, Gwinnett, and Clayton.[27] This freed supporters from having to discuss issues unrelated to metropolitan Atlanta. Moreover, that counties could leave the system through future referenda if they ended up not liking the final plan was thought to increase yes votes. In speeches, lectures, and pamphlets prepared with the assistance of Infoplan, Vandiver and others from the Committee of 100 worked to demonstrate why Atlanta needed rapid transit as part of a balanced transportation system. The Committee of 100 urged its audience to accept that Atlanta was involved in a stiff competition with other big cities such as San Francisco, Chicago, and Los Angeles over federal money and, perhaps even more important, national reputation. Indeed, this discourse of urban competition appeared persistently in the advocates' major arguments. When the US House was about to vote on the UMTA in June 1963, Infoplan had already prepared two kinds of speech drafts for the press—one for if it passed and one for if it did not. If the vote was successful, the press release would stress how federal assistance "will help us build *our* rapid transit system" and claim that "Atlanta is *now* in the *position* to be one of *first cities* to benefit from the new legislation [emphasis in original]." If the House were to kill the bill, the plan was for Vandiver to comment in upbeat fashion, "This is not to say . . . that we are discouraged." The chairman admired San Francisco, which had already made a decision to build its own rapid transit system, and he planned to contend that "the Atlanta area is not far behind" the Golden Gate City and that "[w]e, too, have a steady population growth, vast business and industrial potential . . . and *assuredly*, we *too*, have the ability to solve our problems."[28] In short, the language of competition prevailed in speech drafts and clearly underscores how the advocates saw the importance of rapid transit in metropolitan Atlanta.

Moreover, the protransit faction stressed the competition as an international one. Atlanta, they insisted, was the one city in the United States that had to catch up with foreign counterparts. In this manner, the Committee of 100 and Infoplan cleverly played on Cold War anxieties by praising Soviet rail transit plans. For instance, in their monthly newsletter "Rapid Transit Gram," references to mass transit systems in non-US cities frequently appeared, implicitly serving as rebukes for supposedly modern US cities that lacked such systems. The newsletter warned that it "has been reported that Soviet engineers are working on several schemes to build monorail in Russia."[29] This point was supported by reference to rapid transit planning in the Kamchatka Peninsula, Magnitogorsk, and Moscow.

Closer to home and on this side of the Iron Curtain, references to the public transit systems in Toronto and Montreal also appeared frequently. Vandiver and the Committee of 100 then used these reports as sources for their speeches. In particular, the praise of foreign experimentations was used to give the impression that rapid transit was a mark of progress that could, if properly supported and realized, represent a victory for the US in the global competition over development.[30]

"Housewives and Shoppers": Identifying Supporters for the Rapid Transit Referendum

While emphasizing mass transit's role in Atlanta's economic growth, the champions of mass transit attempted to identify the possible users of the proposed system and sell them the idea of the new mode of public transportation. As part of its basic strategic planning, Infoplan undertook concise market research to gauge public thinking on rapid transit. An opinion survey they undertook in major "sections of the city" produced encouraging results.[31] The surveyors learned that 94 percent of the respondents were in favor of the rapid transit system, even though 68 percent of the respondents commuted to Atlanta by car. The investigation in downtown Atlanta and suburban sites revealed, however, that "housewives and shoppers in outlying shopping areas were found to be poorly informed if at all on the subject." Therefore, Infoplan argued that "a far more basic approach will have to be taken in speeches before garden clubs, P.T.A. and other strictly women's day-time groups." The author stressed that "both groups vote, one is as equally important as the other, in so far as the communication campaign is concerned."[32]

Along with these multifarious community efforts, Infoplan sought to take advantage of the power of "press, radio, [and] television" in its campaign for rapid transit public education. For instance, the company's plan listed radio stations to which the Committee of 100 could send lecturers to participate in the airing of favorable discussion and called for the distribution of fifty thousand copies of "What You Should Know about Rapid Transit," a 1961 pamphlet produced by the Atlanta Region Metropolitan Planning Committee (hereafter ARMPC), a regional planning advisory organization.

Infoplan also proposed the production of a documentary film, viewings of which were accompanied by an "information booth" equipped with "telephone service" and "printed information" that visitors could pick up

at their leisure, along with "handbills, bumper stickers, and billboards."[33] The scenario proposed for the film clearly demonstrated the ways in which the Committee of 100 and Infoplan attempted to reach, in the words of the company, "directly to the people." The documentary's footage supported the following three points: "1) traffic is beginning to strangle us; 2) traffic will indeed have strangled us by 1980 unless something is done; and 3) rapid transit is that something." The company also indicated that the footage should contain "artwork and animation, depicting how much worse the situation will be in 1980, unless something is done about it." Moreover, the audiovisual presentation was expected to make a powerful impression through using "graphs, charts, and animation which projects the future traffic jams that will occur unless rapid transit is implemented."[34]

Another advantage of having a documentary film over, for instance, a series of speeches, was that it would not be limited by time and place but, rather, could be viewed in numerous locations at any time. Indeed, Infoplan stressed that the film was "ready to roll anytime" at "scores of civic and professional organizations," including the American Legion, Civitan Club, and Rotary Club.[35] Infoplan also called on WSB-TV to run the film on their news program while the Georgia General Assembly was in session, believing that this would be indispensable for "putting public opinion behind this project."[36]

As accorded with their printed materials, the completed Committee of 100 documentary portrayed traffic jams as a problem that directly affected people on the street and promoted this argument for maximum effect. To highlight this point, the film opened with self-described "scenes of story book Atlanta . . . all peaceful and picturesque" until suddenly the city morphs into a gloomy and grotesque landscape with "scenes of traffic jams . . . [and] carbon monoxide atmosphere."[37] Thereupon a census bureau worker appears and discusses Atlanta's rapid population growth, and a highway department official states that Atlanta would need "more expressways." These "man-on-the-Street interviews" underscored the views of the professionals. Ultimately, everything led to the desired conclusion: "Yes, we need rapid transit."[38]

"A Great Victory" for the Urban Core

Promises of broad-based economic gains, victory in a Cold War–tinged global competition, and the prospect of preventing endless future traffic jams were not the only arguments made by rapid transit advocates. Careful reading of their views reveals that they also considered the unbalanced

development happening in metropolitan Atlanta. Toward this end, Vandiver argued that the rapid transit system would not only benefit the downtown area but also benefit "the farthest corners of the metropolitan region because people can live wherever they like" and still "get quickly and conveniently to any other parts of the region."[39] In sum, they argued that rapid transit would work better for suburbanites than other available options.

Nevertheless, the main mission of rapid transit was to prevent the suburbs from surpassing downtown Atlanta in importance, rather than to enhance social mobility. An *Atlanta Journal* editorial right before the November 3 election claimed that "a rapid transit system" would be "a vital factor in the metropolitan area's survival." Under the title "First Step," the editors urged readers to cast a yes vote for the amendment because it would revive the downtown district of the city of Atlanta, which they identified as "the keystone for metropolitan structure." Continuing this line of reasoning, they wrote, "Let Atlanta falter economically and the five counties will feel it quickly and to the same degree as does the downtown section"; to avoid such a fate, "rapid transit is needed."[40] The *Atlanta Journal* further bolstered their case by reporting that ARMPC chairman Glenn C. Bennett declared that metropolitan Atlanta was "the 'unquestioned' economic capital of the Southeast" but that to keep that status required "maintain[ing] a good, lively downtown area." According to Bennett, "It would be lopsided of the community to allow outlying portions of the metropolitan area to continue to grow while the central city stands still."[41] For Bennett and the editors, rapid transit offered the ideal solution to that possible problem.

Wherever their emphasis resided, the result of the education campaign mounted by the advocates of rapid transit was victory. That these mass transit supporters saw suburban commuters as the major beneficiaries of the proposed system was visible in the way they celebrated the news of their success. A political cartoon that appeared after the 1964 general election alongside an article celebrating "an overwhelming victory" for the rapid transit plan illustrates this point well. The drawing portrays how such suburban cities as Marietta in Cobb County, Norcross in Gwinnett County, and Forest Park in Clayton County (on map) would be connected to the downtown via rapid transit and shows a white-collar man with a suit, tie, and eyeglasses identified as "Atlanta Commuters" watering a tree. Inscribed on the can is "Amendment 16," and the branches of the tree lead to and support suburban towns. Of particular importance was that, in the image, metropolitan Atlanta was depicted as a collection of towns *connected to the city center*, with the city's growth relying on the commuters who would

utilize the new mass transit system.

The cartoonist would likely have agreed with Bennett that the victory was a watershed moment and one that was entirely positive. The ARMPC chairman declared that "the vote was a great victory for intergovernmental cooperation" and further stated:

> [This] was the first time a regional plan had been presented to all the people of the [metropolitan] region for implementation. The habit of thinking and acting as a region will soon become common, for in this urban age metropolitan areas such as ours are definite large economic and social units, regardless of the number of political jurisdictions involved. Our problems are regional; their solutions require regional action. . . . But we are on our way![42]

Meanwhile, despite sending a thank-you letter to the members of the Committee of 100 for their effort, Vandiver continued to play a role beyond the 1964 victory.[43] In June 1965, when another referendum was held for five counties to decide if they would participate in the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, Vandiver became involved. The new plan, approved by the general assembly in March 1965, was covered by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on May 20 in a multiple-page article.[44] In this, Vandiver once again emphasized how the new rail system would contribute to the city's competitiveness and to the growth of the metropolitan area as a whole, saying, "We're growing amazingly fast" and that, once rapid transit was in operation, "the more solid our economy can become."[45] Here, mobility was valuable as long as it was expected to create wealth; the idea was that rapid transit would enable the city of Atlanta to rise, and the prosperity would eventually trickle down to the suburban counties, leading to overall growth of metropolitan Atlanta and the state of Georgia.

Mobility for Whom?: Public Transit in the Age of White Flight

Although at the outset of the 1960s few Georgians had a clear idea of what rapid transit was, by the middle of the decade things had changed dramatically. The efforts of Vandiver's Committee of 100 played a major role in bringing about passage of the UMTA of 1964, which enabled cities like Atlanta to gain federal two-thirds matching grants to construct public transportation systems. Moreover, the endorsement by the five metropolitan counties of Amendment 16 in November 1964, which allowed for

establishing a "public corporation" to oversee rapid transit in Georgia, was also a product of the committee's endeavors. These advocates believed that bringing rapid transit to Atlanta would trigger a statewide economic boom, which would be the major ingredient in future economic progress in a state transitioning from a largely rural to mostly urban population. They argued that getting rid of traffic congestion was a must to enhance the growth they desired. Furthermore, reflecting midcentury Cold War anxieties, the Committee of 100 placed their project in the context of national and even international competition among cities over technological progress and economic expansion.

In this context and as demonstrated in their comments and actions, these men and women envisioned a future metropolitan Atlanta as imagined community. Despite there remaining important differences in terms of race and class in the five counties, the advocates nevertheless viewed the future metropolitan Atlanta as one intertwined community made up of suburban middle-class workers benefitting from a much easier commute. The goal of rapid transit advocates was to maintain the prestige of the central city by connecting it to the booming communities in the peripheries. They believed that rapid transit would enable the downtown to triumph over those rising towns.

When conjuring up the image, one aspect to which the white boosters and political elites did not pay much attention was that metropolitan Atlanta was experiencing a demographic change. Especially racial and probably class composition was changing because of white flight: the Committee of 100, however, did not articulate it, even though they clearly acknowledged the phenomenon.[46] As discussed previously, they found it useful to advertise rapid transit to "housewives and shoppers" in suburban shopping malls, but they did not acknowledge the plight of African Americans, most of whom commuted by the private Atlanta Transit System (ATS) bus service.

The attempt by rapid transit supporters to empower the downtown reflected their desire to reverse the decline in the number of white property owners in Atlanta. For the city's political and economic leaders, restoring the white population and their property ownership was vital for the city's healthy growth. They saw rapid transit as the way to meet that goal. Indeed, the membership of the Rapid Transit Committee of 100, originally recommended by political and economic leaders including Mayor Allen, did not represent the demography of metropolitan Atlanta. For instance, of the twenty-five recommendations sent to Vandiver for the Atlanta area's representatives, only two were African Americans and only four were

female. This representation was far from fair given that African Americans would make up more than half of the population by 1970.[47]

This optimistic vision of one community united by a transit system soon faced challenges. Suburban white counties did not favor the idea. Those forces, armed with anti–big government rhetoric, had gradually begun to rally in suburban counties. Indeed, even before the 1964 election, a rapid transit advocate discovered that "it was perfectly evident from the start that Cobb County was going to be our problem."[48] Vandiver agreed with him, confessing that he "had a few nervous moments before the results of Cobb County" in the 1964 referendum victory.[49]

By 1965, the suburban rebellion became evident. Aside from rosy campaigns in newspapers, Vandiver gave talks on behalf of the 1965 referendum, which was for the metropolitan five counties to decide if they would join the newly formed public transit authority, MARTA. The rapid transit advocates, including Vandiver, knew that people in Cobb County had an "'Anti-Atlanta' feeling." They believed that rapid transit would take "their trade" away from Cobb and promote "encroachment by Atlanta into Cobb's political affairs." "Negroes will settle along rapid transit routes," they also feared, along with predicting that Atlanta's demands for public service would bring a heavier tax burden.[50]

Vandiver tried to justify the rapid transit project. At a meeting held at the chamber of commerce in affluent white-majority north Dekalb, the former governor contended that rapid transit represented democracy. According to him, publicly funded rapid transit was necessary because a "mass transit system of the size needed to serve Metropolitan Atlanta" was regarded as "beyond the means of private capital." For him, this "follows the Jeffersonian principle of government doing only things which the people cannot do so well, or do at all, for themselves."[51] Despite his efforts, suburban Cobb County declined to join MARTA in the June 1965 referendum. The heart of the rising antigovernment impulse resided in such growing suburban counties, and Cobb County in particular saw a growth in separatism in their confrontation with an expanding Atlanta.

Indeed, Vandiver recognized the very danger of white flight; however, he understood it in the context of the physical and economic decline of the urban core. After the election, the committee chair had a talk with young people at the meeting titled, "Emphasis—The City," held at Holy Innocents' Episcopal Church in Atlanta. According to him, white flight was problem, saying that "with such shifts in population and the accompanying trade districts, many of our once flourishing and prosperous city districts

become outmoded and obsolete." He urged the audience to care about the plight of the central city, arguing that "the people remaining in the old central city require welfare programs, job training, low rent housing and other social services." For Vandiver, however, helping them did not mean facing and eliminating racial discrimination, saying, "Many people believe that the effort put into keeping our cities truly livable are basic to national security—and to our competition for men's minds and allegiance."[52] The advocates' white, middle-class paternalistic view of community failed to see the plight of African Americans and their ongoing struggle for civil rights. Despite their belief in New Deal liberalism, the champions of mass transit overlooked those who often needed this means of mobility the most—the impoverished.

Subsequent elections in 1971 to determine if the four counties would remain in the network of public transit showed that two more suburban counties—Clayton and Gwinnett—chose not to join the new community forged by the rapid transit network. Their attempt to make one social and economic unit ironically furthered disintegration. In the end, only two counties, Fulton and DeKalb, joined the system. (See map.) In sum, the making of rapid transit ignited the rebellion of suburbs against the city of Atlanta.[53] The attempt to construct one community united by a new mode of mobility without addressing internal changes and conflicts had paved the way to this ironic result.

NOTES

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[1] Charles Weltner, interview by Cliff Kuhn, July 17, 1986, transcript, Georgia Government Documentation Project, Special Collection & Archives, Georgia State University Library, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

[2] For a concise explanation of the progress of urban mass transportation legislation, see David W. Jones, *Mass Motorization+Mass Transit: An American History and Policy Analysis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), chap. 6; and George M. Smerk, "Development of Federal Urban Mass Transportation Policy," *Indiana Law Journal* 47 (Winter 1972): 249–91.

[3] For scholars of urban history, demonstrating how racial and class divides have emerged and shaped the lives of people in metropolitan areas has been an important mission. Atlanta is no exception. For examples, see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). On the general history of twentieth-century Atlanta, see Larry

Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); and Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996), both of which demonstrate how traffic constitutes one of the keys to success of this mission. Kruse, in addition to authoring the above-mentioned book about white flight in Atlanta, has written a concise introduction in the 1619 Project of the *New York Times* regarding how Atlanta's interstate highway system built racism into the city's landscape (Kevin M. Kruse, "How Segregation Caused Your Traffic Jam, *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019). These authors have also judged rapid transit to be a failure because it lacks sufficient stations in the suburbs. Here, I reveal that the causes of this eventual failure of MARTA were present in the initial proposal made before the actual construction or operation of the rapid transit system. This argument differs from that made by Zachary M. Schrag in his detailed research on Washington Metro, which showed how the public transit system in the nation's capital represented Great Society liberalism (Zachary M. Schrag, *The Great Society Subway: A History of the Washington Metro* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). I contend that the liberalism of urban business and political elites in the early 1960s was severely limited by their refusal to understand the physical and economic decline of Atlanta in terms of race relations.

[4] "Big Counties Kill Rapid Transit Idea," *Atlanta Journal* (hereafter *AJ*), November 13, 1962.

[5] Ivan Allen to S. Ernest Vandiver, March 4, 1963, folder 3, box 5, v. legal office files, S. Ernest Vandiver Jr. Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (hereafter SEVP); "Senate Gives Nod to Transit Panel," *AJ*, March 14, 1963.

[6] For Allen's mayorship, see Ivan Allen Jr. with Paul Hemphill, *Mayor: Notes on the Sixties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971); and Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

[7] "Summerville, Vandiver on Transit Panel," *AJ*, March 6, 1963.

[8] For Vandiver's governorship of Georgia, see Harold Paulk Henderson, *Ernest Vandiver, Governor of Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

[9] James C. Cobb, *Georgia Odyssey: A Short History of the State* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 70.

[10] By allocating more votes in less-populated areas during state primaries, Georgia's county unit system (1917–62) worked as a way for rural residents to maintain their political power. This system considered the county, not the number of the votable citizens, as the base unit for votes; therefore, rural areas gained more power than urban areas where most business establishments were located.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ivan Allen to Ernest Vandiver, March 4, 1963, folder 3, box 5, v. legal office files, SEVP; Ernest Vandiver to Ivan Allen, March 5, 1963, folder 3, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[13] Ernest Vandiver to Herman Talmadge and Richard Russell, telegram, April 1, 1963, folder 3, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[14] "Georgia Salons Talk of Capital," *AJ*, April 5, 1963.

[15] "Transit Bill Is Passed by Senate," *Washington Post, Times Herald*, April 5, 1963.

[16] John Flint to Ernest Vandiver, April 16, 1964, folder 2, box 1, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[17] Tom Pickett to Ernest Vandiver, telegram, June 18, 1964, folder 2 box 1, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[18] "Transit Bill Is Passed by House," *Washington Post, Times Herald*, June 26, 1964.

[19] "Some Large Cities Likely to Ask for Help under Mass Transit Act," *Washington Post, Times Herald*, July 6, 1964.

[20] Charles Weltner to S. Ernest Vandiver, June 30, 1964, folder 2, box 6, v. legal office

files, SEVP.

[21] Ernest Vandiver to Herman Talmadge and Richard Russell, telegram, April 1, 1963, folder 3, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[22] Ernest Vandiver to Charles Weltner, John Flynt, Eliot Hagen, and Phillip M. Landrum, April 7, 1964, folder 2, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[23] "What Fire?," *AJ*, November 12, 1962.

[24] "Rapid Transit Panels Meet, Ooze Confidence," *AJ*, April 11, 1963.

[25] The Committee of 100's mission was to collect funding to undertake this public relations campaign. The letter to business leaders from Vandiver solicited donations—the amount of the donation differed according to the size of the company—saying that they were "operating under extreme difficulties because of our quasi-official status." Vandiver to Business leaders, November 3 and December 13, 1963, in folder 4, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[26] "Promoters Raise Rapid Transit Fund," *AJ*, July 20, 1964.

[27] "19 Local Amendments Face Metro Voters," *AJ*, November 2, 1964.

[28] "Vandiver Rapid Transit Statement If Bill Does Not Pass," and "Vandiver Rapid Transit Statement If Bill Passes the House," June 17, 1963, folder 1, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[29] Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority of 100, "Rapid Transit Gram," February 10, 1964, folder 1, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[30] The information sources primarily came from documents published by industries that had a vested interest in selling rapid transit systems. For example, General Electric's pamphlet "Going Places," which was sent periodically to the Committee of 100's office, was a source of information that members relied on in constructing their rapid transit discourse. For General Electric's "Going Places," see From Robert M. Cautltas, Washington Representative, Metropolitan Transportation General Electric Company, to S. Ernest Vandiver, August 17, 1964, folder 10, box 5, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[31] Infoplan conducted the survey at the Bank of Georgia building in downtown, the Belvedere shipping area, Auburn Avenue, Lenox Shopping Plaza, the State Capitol, Rich's Stewart-Lakewood Shopping Plaza, and the West End Shopping Plaza. "Part I: Background," in "A Public Relations and Publicity Recommendation Developed for Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Committee of 100," developed by Infoplan, August 14, 1963, folder 5, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid. "Part II: Objective," in "A Public Relations and Publicity Recommendation Developed for Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Committee of 100," developed by Infoplan, August 14, 1963, folder 5, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Meeting with WSB television, Infoplan Contact Report, January 14, 1964, folder 1, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[37] Lunch Conference, WSB-Television news, January 15 and 16, 1964, Infoplan Contact Report, folder 1, box 6, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Vandiver Supports Transit Proposal," *AJ*, October 7, 1964.

[40] Editorials, *AJ*, September 23, 1964.

[41] "Bennett Says Rapid Transit Vital to Economic Health," *AJ*, October 9, 1964.

[42] Glenn Bennett, "Thoughts after Vote for Rapid Transit," to be released Saturday, November 21, 1964," folder 10, box 5, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[43] Ernest Vandiver to the Members of Rapid Transit Committee of 100, November 30,

1964, folder 10, box 5, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[44] "Rapid Transit: How Fast?," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 20, 1965.

[45] Ibid.

[46] In 1960, the city of Atlanta's population was 488,666, and in the next ten years the population grew to 496,973. The five counties' population (outside Atlanta) increased from 528,522 to 893,191. As for race, the city of Atlanta's African American population rose from 188,031 to 256,470 over the decade, while the white population decreased from 300,635 to 240,503 in the same period. Moreover, family income rose from $5,010 to $8,410 per year in the city, while total Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (Cobb, Gwinnett, Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Rockdale, and Douglass) increased from $5,758 to $10,695. City of Atlanta, *Comprehensive Development Plan, 1976* (1976), 19–21.

[47] "Bennett Says Rapid Transit Vital to Economic Health," *AJ*, October 9, 1964.

[48] Richard Rich to S. Ernest Vandiver, November 6, 1964, folder 10, box 5, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[49] Ernest Vandiver to Richard Rich, November 16, 1964, folder 10, box 5, v. legal office files, SEVP.

[50] "Transit Proposal Faces Stiff Opposition in Cobb," *AJ*, June 3, 1965.

[51] Speech Draft at a Meeting of the North DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, April 4, 1965, folder 6, box 3, iv. speeches and press, SEVP.

[52] "Emphasis—The City" at Holy Innocents' Episcopal Church in Atlanta, n.d., folder 6, box 3, iv. speeches and press, SEVP.

[53] Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 113–14.