

Ongoing investment needed to keep Georgians moving

Transportation improvements must remain a priority for our growing state.



Credit: John Spink

The Ga. 400 southbound shoulder lane opened to morning rush hour traffic Monday in an effort to relieve congestion on one of Georgia's busiest roads. The new setup didn't appear to be helping much, as bumper-to-bumper traffic was reported between Windward Parkway and Northridge Road.

By Greg Dolezal and Rick Jasperse

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Georgia is growing fast, with hundreds moving here every day to pursue their own American Dream in our No.1-ranked business climate. We've all celebrated the record-breaking economic development wins that are bringing tens of thousands of new jobs to our state and prosperity to Georgia families.



This success stems from numerous natural advantages that Georgia enjoys, from a temperate climate to our ocean access to our location that's a two-hour-or-less plane flight from 80 percent of the rest of the country. But Georgia's economy also has grown because of wise, forward-looking policy decisions: expanding highways, modernizing our ports, maintaining our edge with the world's busiest airport and a strong workforce, all while keeping taxes low and

minimizing regulations that block new investment.

Unfortunately, other states have seen Georgia's dazzling economic success and they're trying to catch up. States like Florida, Texas and Tennessee have dedicated billions in state surplus funds to transportation over the last year.

To remain competitive, Georgia must build the transportation infrastructure we need in 2024 to meet future demand in 2050 and beyond. Under the leadership of Gov. Brian Kemp and previous Georgia leaders, we've landed big projects that will drive us forward, but without thoughtful, long-term transportation strategies, Georgians are sure to face worsening congestion across the state.

Today, Georgia sees 40 million trucks on its roads each year, a number that stresses our capacity. Between 2019 and 2021, truck miles traveled in Georgia increased by an estimated 52% statewide and 84% in metro-Atlanta. The amount of freight moving through the state is estimated to increase by 91% over the next 25 years. Without urgent action, we'll face even

longer commutes, pollution and freight delays that cost businesses money and annoy consumers waiting for packages at home.

As the chairmen of the House and Senate transportation committees, we support a strategy during the 2024 session of the General Assembly to dedicate a significant portion of our record surplus revenue toward projects that will bring an incredible return on investment. We applaud Gov. Kemp's plan to invest an additional \$1.5 billion in projects that directly help move commuters and freight and we share the Governor's laser-focused commitment to meeting our infrastructure needs of today and tomorrow. We want to prioritize projects that improve mobility and quality of life, but also pay dividends financially – major road widenings, bridge replacements, improved railroad crossings and better port access. The Georgia Department of Transportation estimates that for every \$1 invested in these types of major supply-chain improvements we get a \$9 return.

Two of the worst bottlenecks in the country are in metro Atlanta and there's no doubt we must add lanes to our interstates and major highways. We have so many tractor-trailers on the interstates that we've run out of room to park them overnight when drivers need to sleep. Creating alternatives for big trucks will increase speeds and safety for daily commuters while also getting Georgia products and consumer goods to their destinations quicker.

The Port of Savannah is now the third busiest in the country – a real point of pride for our state. But more containers mean more trucks and longer trains. In cities large and small, blocked train crossings keep us from getting to work and school on time. We need to build bridges over and under rail lines so traffic can continue to flow even as trains get longer.

The same inflation impacting the cost of groceries has also impacted the cost of transportation infrastructure. The Georgia Department of Transportation estimates that the cost to deliver projects has increased between 22% to 49%.

Under the leadership of Gov. Kemp, Lt. Gov. Burt Jones and House Speaker Jon Burns, Georgia has made significant investments in the transportation infrastructure needed to remain the No. 1 state for business and those investments have paid off. But other states are making aggressive investments to try to catch us. For Georgia's future, we must continue to make those bold moves, beginning with reinvesting our hard-earned dollars into forward-looking transportation improvements. Let's work together to keep our state moving for generations to come.

State Sen. Greg Dolezal, R-Cumming, and State Rep. Rick Jasperse, R-Jasper, are the two transportation committee chairs in the Georgia General Assembly.