



STREET SMARTS

They say that only death and taxes are certain, but *they* must not live in Atlanta. Here, road rage, cell phone-wielding drivers, and rush-hour traffic jams on the Perimeter are just as inevitable. Luckily, the tips, tricks, and secrets you'll find on the following pages will make getting around our labyrinthine city faster, easier, and less stressful. Find out how to talk your way out of a ticket, where the shortcuts and speed traps are, which car is ideal for your commute, why Atlanta has no gridded road system, what's being done to fix the traffic mess, how you can learn to love your commute, and more. Because getting there should be half the fun.

WRITTEN AND REPORTED BY

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PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREA FREMIOTTI

SEVEN WAYS TO FIX THIS MESS

Add up the time that each of us spent stuck in metro-area traffic in 2007, and you'll come up with a horrifying sum: 101,169,000 hours. That's a collective 11,548 years of wasted time and more than \$2 billion in lost productivity in one year. Atlanta has also marked its seventh straight year atop the list of fastest-growing metro areas, and you don't have to be a transportation expert to know what that means for your daily commute. Fortunately, there are a few solutions on the horizon.

» The futuristic option

Last year, Georgia Tech unveiled the Sting 1, a blue Porsche Cayenne that operates without human intervention. The car, designed in collaboration with Science Applications International Corporation, has six cameras, Doppler radar, infrared laser radar, and eight networked computers that know how to stay in a lane, pass cars, merge into traffic, maneuver through a parking lot, and avoid obstacles. The modern-day KITT probably drives better than everyone around you on GA 400. It might not get you out of rush-hour traffic, but it'll reduce your blood pressure while you wait. That's

the good news. The bad news is that you aren't going to be able to get one for a while. "These types of systems will help us become better drivers, but it's probably going to be a decade or so before we see fully autonomous vehicles," says Henrik Christensen, director of Tech's Center for Robotics and Intelligent Machines.

» The high-tech option

A magnetic levitation (maglev) train that hovers a centimeter above the track and travels in excess of 300 miles per hour might one day run between Atlanta and Chattanooga, eventually connecting to Nashville

and possibly even Chicago. Supporters such as Senator Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) say the train would ease traffic around Hartsfield-Jackson and reduce strain on the airport itself by enabling passengers to fly into Chattanooga's Lovell Field, where they could pick up their luggage and hop on a train that would put them in Downtown Atlanta in less than an hour. An \$8 million feasibility study is under way and should be finished next year. Chattanooga's new Volkswagen assembly plant has given the long-debated project a new urgency, but other proposed maglev lines, such as one running from Las Vegas to Anaheim, will probably be finished first. In the meantime, Atlantans can get a glimpse of a maglev train while driving the C.H. James Parkway in Powder Springs, where American Maglev Technology has been running a test track since 2007.

» The green options

A few different train solutions are on the table: the Brain Train, the commuter line through Marietta and Cartersville, and the Lovejoy line extension to Griffin. The first option would connect UGA, Georgia Gwinnett College, Gwinnett Tech, Mercer, Emory, Agnes Scott, Atlanta University Center, Georgia Tech, and Georgia State—thus its nerdstastic name. But it wouldn't just be used by academics. Reports indicate that as many as 10,000 commuters could use the system daily, removing up to 5,300 cars from packed peak-hour highways. Most of the funding would come from the federal government, but a recent reassessment found that double-tracking and significant reconstruction would be needed, putting the cost at around \$700 million, a significant increase compared with the previous \$383 million estimate.

Fans of the Marietta/Cartersville line point to an April study showing their line's \$42 million price tag is far more realistic, particularly consider-



We asked young Atlantans how they'd fix traffic and were rewarded with solutions such as this one by Marina Herrera-Pease, grade 1, Neighborhood Charter School.



SURVEY

We asked readers to tell us about their driving experiences and habits. Here's what they reported:

- 66% have commutes of 30 minutes or less.
- 90% regularly drive alone to work.
- 13% carpool to work occasionally.
- 8% use MARTA.
- 36% have never been in an accident.
- 19% have been in three or more accidents.
- 69% claim they always stop at stop signs, even if there are no cars around.
- 57% don't always use their turn signals to change lanes.
- 76% typically drive at least 10 mph over the posted speed limit on highways.
- 10% typically drive at least 20 mph over the speed limit.
- 60% have not received a speeding ticket in the last five years.
- 12% have received two or more speeding tickets in the last five years.

ing a possible new funding source—a state-owned rail line that generates more than \$6 million in lease payments per year. If the state legislature votes to give up that money for the project, it wouldn't have to appropriate annual money to the commuter rail.

Down south, the commuter rail to Griffin has found a fan in Sonny Perdue, who in June announced his intention to get a pilot program up and running. The governor explained that, unlike the Brain Train, the Griffin line has substantial federal funds (about \$30 million of the estimated \$38 million needed will come from the feds) as well as fewer problems when it comes to track sharing with freight trains. The eighteen-mile extension of the line from Lovejoy to Griffin is expected to increase ridership by

recommended nearly everything but public transport because of Atlanta's comparatively low population density (our population is skyrocketing, but our boundaries are broadening too, giving metro Atlanta a low people-per-square-mile ratio).

The report's author, Robert Poole Jr.—who advised the California and Florida DOTs as well as the last four White Houses on transport policy issues—suggests a new East-West toll corridor that would extend from Langford Parkway and would potentially link I-285 and I-20; upgrades of major arterials such as Roswell Road, Holcomb Bridge, and Peachtree Industrial into expressways with semilimited access; and grade separations at major intersections. “The Atlanta Regional Commission's



Ellias Kitt, grade 3, Neighborhood Charter School. Visit atlantamagazine.com for more traffic solutions from Atlanta's kids.

about 45 percent—2,200 additional riders per day—with only a small increase in operating costs.

»The car lovers' option

When Reason Foundation, a California-based nonpartisan public policy research firm, received a grant from the Galvin Foundation to look at congestion relief options for major U.S. cities, Atlanta was first on its list. Its 2006 report titled “Reducing Congestion in Atlanta: A Bold New Approach to Increasing Mobility”

own long-range plan to try to provide more transit alternatives said it would hardly make a difference in the percentage of people who use the car—mostly alone,” says Poole. “And given that reality, I think a solution to traffic congestion has got to involve a lot more highway capacity.”

According to an exercise run on Atlanta Regional Commission's traffic assignment model, a total of 2,613 lane miles would have to be added between 2005 and 2030 to keep up with population growth. That would



How to Get Out of a Speeding Ticket

Lying, crying, batting your eyelashes—these tactics work about as well on highway patrol officers as they did on your mama. You're better off heeding Mom's time-honored advice:

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

When those blue lights come on, you shouldn't make the officer tail you for miles, but neither should you swerve onto a narrow shoulder at the bend of a curve. Wait for a safe opportunity, signal your lane change, and move to the right. Keep in mind that the officer doesn't know if you're late for your kid's soccer game or fleeing a drug bust. You can take some of the pressure off by keeping both hands on the wheel, with paperwork ready and accessible. “Any time you start going to the glove box or console, tell him before you open it so he's not surprised,” says Lieutenant Paul Cosper, public information officer for the Georgia State Patrol.

REMEMBER YOUR MANNERS

Sure, you're flustered, but try to be friendly. “If your personalities just happen to click, the officer may let you

go,” says R. David Botts, an attorney with thirty years' experience in traffic defense. A simple “sir” or “ma'am” helps. And unless you're absolutely certain there's been a mistake, don't argue. “When you tell an officer his laser is wrong, he won't pay any more attention to you,” he says.

ASK NICELY

The most effective strategy is also the most easily overlooked. Don't just hope for a break—ask for one. If the offense wasn't egregious or your record is clean, there's a good chance the officer will let you off with a warning. Can't afford an insurance hike? Say so. One less mile per hour and you keep your license? Plead for mercy. “It doesn't hurt to ask, ‘Please don't write me a ticket.’ You give your reasons, and [the officer] will or he won't, but it's always nice to be courteous. That goes a long way,” says Cosper.

mean adding an average of sixty-six freeway lane miles per year, even more than the sixty-four per year added between 1983 and 1992.

»The underground option

You may ask yourself where we could possibly fit 2,613 additional lane miles. Some of it would be added to existing highways. And according to the Reason Foundation, some of it should go underground. The foundation recommends a double-decker tunnel linking the southern end of GA 400 with I-20 and later with the northern end of I-675. With a diameter of forty-five feet, the tunnel would feature three eleven-foot lanes and an overhead clearance of twelve feet for buses. "We'll look at tunnels, skyways, anything anyone can think of," says GDOT spokesman David Spear. "The reality of the tunnel is it's an extraordinarily expensive proposition, but from an engineering standpoint, it's viable." And chances are, it'd be even more expensive and complicated than we think. Just ask Boston; that city's tunneling project (the Big Dig) ballooned in cost from \$2.8 billion to \$22 billion, sprang hundreds of leaks, and killed a motorist when part of its ceiling collapsed in 2006. It is, at the very least, a cautionary tale worth noting.

»The pay-to-play option

In November, the U.S. Department



SURVEY

40%
will block an intersection when they are in a hurry.

12%
merge as late as possible when their lane is ending.

72%
merge as soon as possible when their lane is ending.

72%
gawk at accidents.

47%
will not drive even a short distance if they have had one or two drinks.

5%
have received a DUI.

16%
have flirted with or hit on another driver in traffic. More than a few reported that the object of their affection smiled back and/or offered a phone number. "Someone flashed a '10' on a piece of paper and pointed to me. I blushed and kept driving!"



Ella Wilcox, kindergarten, Neighborhood Charter School

of Transportation forked over a \$110 million grant to help reduce Atlanta's traffic misery. Georgia will spend part of the funds on commuter buses and park-and-ride facilities, but will also transform high-occupancy vehicle lanes to high-occupancy toll lanes.

HOT lanes, the first of which will open on I-85 from I-285 to Old Peachtree Road in the next two years, enable hurried drivers to pay a premium to cruise past stalled traffic—a controversial system supported by only 38 percent of respondents in *Atlanta* magazine's traffic survey. GDOT's long-term plan is to create a network of priced express lanes across the metro area for buses, drivers who are willing to pay tolls based on congestion, and high-occupancy vehicles—though the definition of "high occupancy" may change to vehicles with at least three or four passengers.

In L.A., home of the country's worst congestion, drivers pay fifty cents a mile on similar lanes during morning peak hours, seventy to eighty cents in the afternoon, and as much as ninety cents a mile for a couple of really sticky hours on Friday afternoons. Poole says, "We think Atlanta's tolls would be less than half of what L.A.'s need to be." GDOT and the State Road & Tollway Authority (SRTA) are studying pricing. An SRTA survey found that 40 percent of drivers would pay fifty cents per mile for a five-minute sav-

ings, 65 percent to save ten minutes, and 70 percent to save fifteen minutes. There would still be a few people with arguably more money than sense who'd be willing to pay more than \$3 per mile for any time savings at all.

»The quick option

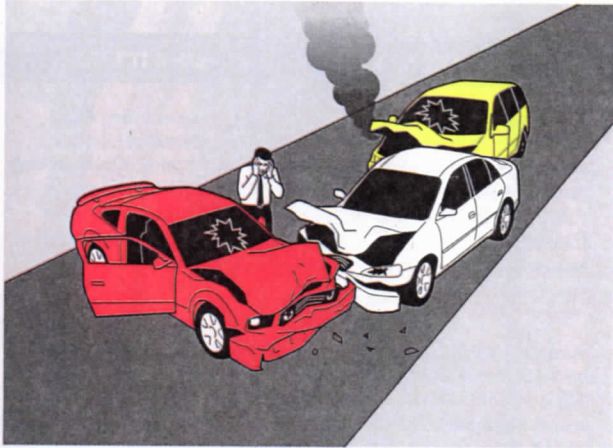
GDOT is more than halfway through its Fast Forward plan. It involves large-scale projects such as the completed Perimeter Center Parkway Bridge over I-285 on the northside, which has dramatically eased blockage in the Ashford Dunwoody Corridor, and Gwinnett's I-85/GA 316 interchange, which has raised speeds by as much as 64 percent in some areas during rush hour. The Fast Forward program is spending \$211 million to expand Georgia's Intelligent Transportation System (NaviGator) and increase the number of Highway Emergency Response Operators (HERO) by forty-four units as well as \$116 million to synchronize about 2,500 traffic signals throughout the metro area. Plus—love 'em or hate 'em—ramp meters, many already in place and many more to come, are expected to reduce peak delays by 7 percent. In the nine months since meters were added to the Downtown Connector, engineers have seen a one-minute decrease in travel time between Brookwood and the Grady Curve. —KIMBERLY TURNER



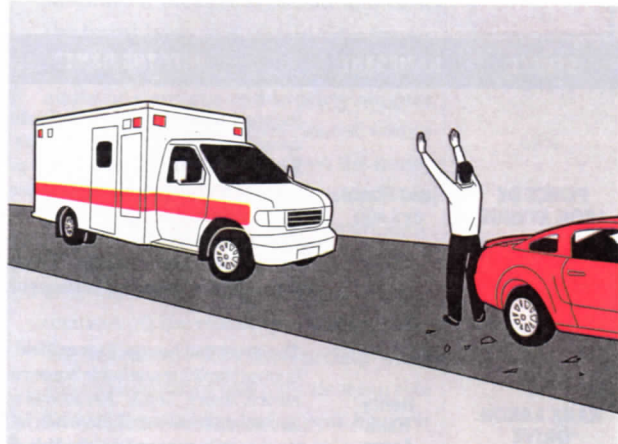
Martis Flinn, Sydney Warren, Kathryn Goodgame, grade 6, The Children's School.

Mechanics of a Wreck

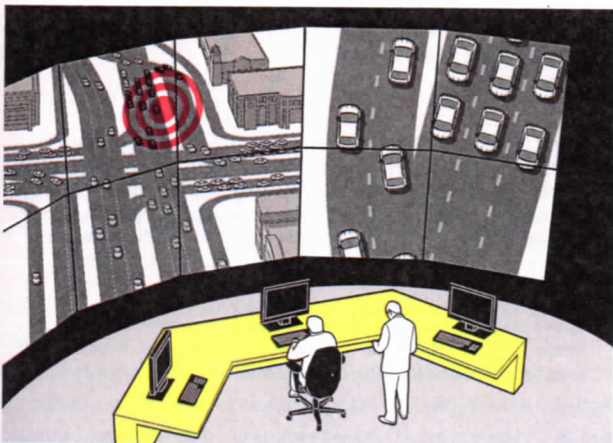
YOUR DRIVE TO AND FROM WORK IS A TANGLED WEB OF CAUSE AND EFFECT. Here, we break down a typical car wreck in Atlanta and show how it affects you, whether you're directly involved or beating your fists on the wheel ten miles back.



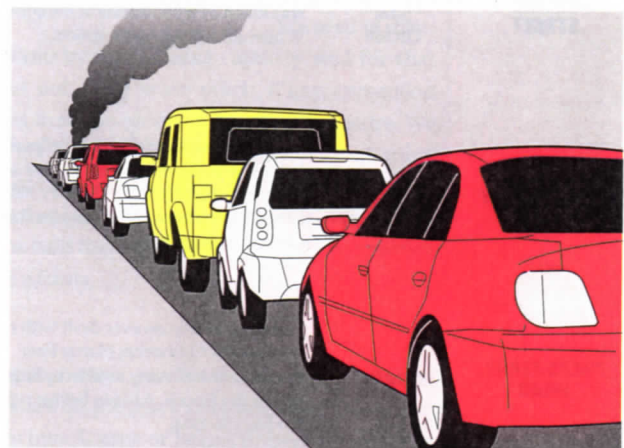
If you're in a wreck and the car is drivable, it's vital that you pull to the side of the road. Not only will it save others time—the Georgia DOT estimates that for every minute a lane is blocked, it takes three to seven minutes for traffic to recover—but it might save lives. Fifteen percent to 25 percent of all freeway accidents are secondary crashes, according to GDOT.



Several types of support will arrive in the order they were notified. Depending on the severity, the dispatcher will contact the appropriate agencies—law enforcement, EMS, fire, HERO trucks. On the scene, police will determine if additional services—towing and recovery, hazardous materials cleanup—are needed. In January, HERO services averaged eleven minutes' response time to automobile incidents and thirteen minutes in roadway clearance time.



GDOT's Transportation Management Center, which dispatches the HERO trucks, monitors our roads with a complex "intelligent transportation system" called NaviGator. Using video cameras installed every one-third mile on metro interstates and a technology called cell phone probe data (see page 64), plus tips from patrolling HEROs and bystanders who've dialed the 511 hotline, the TMC is often the first to know of an incident. They'll alert 911 and vice versa; they have similar reciprocity with media outlets. Once the TMC locates an incident, they keep a close watch—which means when you're standing there on the side of the road, not only does that big yellow truck have your back, but operators in a Grant Park control room probably do too. Big Brother never seemed so benevolent.



According to the 2007 Urban Mobility Report by the Texas Transportation Institute, gridlock in Atlanta cost drivers a combined \$2.58 billion in 2005, primarily in opportunity costs and wasted fuel. The report also calculates the average per-hour value of our time at \$14.60. So if one minute of one lane blockage requires up to seven minutes' recovery time, as GDOT reports, then a thirty-minute single-lane blockage could cost the average commuter up to \$51.10 in lost time—more if multiple lanes are involved. No wonder we have road rage.

DISCLAIMER

We will get letters. Oh yes, we will. Unhappy letters from those who think that now—in this, the Age of Fluctuating Fuel Prices, the Era of Melting Glaciers, the Epoch of Rush-Hour Standstills—is certainly not the time to be encouraging Atlantans to get into their cars. They'll wonder how we dare to advise on which cars are best, which roads the fastest, which intersections the most dangerous, without also discussing the merits of public transit. So we'll explain: We are green. We produced a "green" issue. We covered MARTA's woes, the BeltLine's progress, and the city's transit challenges. We recycle our Coke cans. But we're also realists. We know you understand the benefits of public transit. We also know that come tomorrow morning, the vast majority of you will get into your car and go to work. So let's make the most of it.

Who the Heck Was Juan Ponce de León?

The stories behind Atlanta's street names.

STREET	NAMESAKE	WHY THE NAME?	DID YOU KNOW ...	IF WE NAMED IT TODAY ...
PONCE DE LEON AVENUE	Juan Ponce de León	Railroad workers believed the freshwater spring now buried under The Sears Building (City Hall East) had medicinal properties, and it was aptly renamed Ponce de León Springs after the Spanish explorer who sought the Fountain of Youth. Between 1870 and 1920, thousands flocked there to swim and take a healing gulp.	A wildly popular amusement park was built in the valley around the springs. It featured picnic grounds, dance halls, rides, and a theater and earned the nickname "The Coney Island of Atlanta."	Today, Atlanta's healing water is bubbly, caramel in color, and quenches the thirst of folks around the world. Time to pay a visit to Pembey-Highland? No offense, Poncey, but the father of Coca-Cola gets this one: Pemberton Avenue.
HANK AARON DRIVE	Henry "Hank" Aaron	The street that houses Turner Field honors Hank's remarkable home run record. Henry "Hank" Aaron was wearing an Atlanta Braves uniform when he broke the record in 1974 and finished his career with 755 home runs, the street address of Turner Field.	As the home runs added up, so did the racist hate mail from those who did not want a black man to break Babe Ruth's record. Lewis Grizzard wrote an obituary for Hank—just in case.	There's no replacing this one. We love McCann and Chipper, but Aaron is a living legend!
LUCKIE STREET	Solomon "Sam" Luckie	Solomon "Sam" Luckie, an African American barber and one of few freed slaves in Atlanta during the Civil War era, was killed by a bombshell at the corner of Whitehall and Alabama streets.	Local pop-rock band Cartel has a song called "Luckie Street," Butch Walker has an album titled <i>Leavin' the Game on Luckie Street</i> , and there's even an R&B party band that shares the street's moniker.	Somehow, Solomon Street just seems more appropriate.
CASTLEBERRY STREET	Daniel Castleberry	In 1821, Daniel Castleberry is believed to have won the real estate hot spot surrounding this street (Castleberry Hill) in a land lottery. Now there's an idea for the Georgia Lottery folks.	In the mid-nineteenth century, Castleberry Hill, plagued by prostitution, gambling, and cockfighting, became a red-light district known as Snake Nation.	The snake oil salesmen have packed their bags, and gallery owners have moved in. In homage to the antiquated railroad district and now-bustling art scene, our vote goes to Canvas Station.
PACES FERRY ROAD	Hardy Pace	Long before anyone ever dealt with rush hour on the Connector, Hardy Pace operated one of many vital ferry lines across the Hooch. An iron bridge replaced the ferry in 1904.	Pace was thought to have owned at least 10,000 acres from Smyrna to Buckhead.	Home Depot corporate headquarters claims this one: Marcus Blank Hammer Road.

CELL RESEARCH

HELICOPTERS ARE SO PASSÉ. Thanks to two Atlanta-based companies, Intellione and AirSage, the tool used for the next generation of traffic prediction and reporting is in your bag or pocket right now. When your cell phone—and the other 220 million or so across the country—is on, it is constantly sending out signals that can be used to determine your location. If enough of those signals

are on the road, they can reveal the density and speed of traffic.

It may sound like a privacy nightmare, but both companies ensure that no personal information is gathered. "The data we receive is anonymous and aggregated before we see it," says Tom Bouwer, COO of AirSage, which uses its agreement with wireless carrier Sprint Nextel to collect data from more than 51 million phones, then sends it to businesses such as Westwood One,

which provides traffic information for more than 2,200 radio and television stations. Intellione shares its information with Canadian radio and television stations and others.

Both companies are working on applications that will make their live traffic updates available to ordinary drivers. Intellione's *io vector* can be used on any cell phone with a data plan, regardless of carrier, and enables drivers to monitor as many as ten regular routes. The free downloadable appli-

cation, which also helps users find alternate routes, local businesses, and special offers, is scheduled to be available in thirty cities by June, but the company may give its hometown of Atlanta a thirty-day sneak peek during the first week of May.

AirSage's application will also provide drivers with specific traffic and routing information, helping them choose better routes and avoid traffic jams. A phone-friendly version is in the works and will be available within the next few months.

For more information, visit intellione.com or airsage.com.





SURVEY

85%
sing in the car.

49%
sing in the car, even
with a passenger.

Five most-despised
drivers:

Slow drivers 32%
Drivers who don't
signal 20%
Distracted
drivers 16%
Impatient/speedy
drivers 7%
Tailgaters 7%

22%
tailgate at least
occasionally.

47%
tap their brakes
when the driver
behind them is fol-
lowing too closely.
"I'll turn on my
headlights, which
brightens my tail-
lights without
having to apply the
brakes."

52%
move to another
lane if they are being
tailed.

34%
slow down when
they are tailed.

8%
speed up when they
are being tailed.
Maybe it's not such
an effective way to
hurry someone along
after all.

52%
do not slow
to the marked
speed limit in
construction
zones.

with involves clearing accidents sooner using the Towing and Recovery Incentive Program (TRIP). When there's a major accident, a towing company can get an incentive if they get to the site and clear the travel lanes in a certain time frame. During peak hours, the operator must arrive on the scene within thirty minutes and have the travel lanes cleared within ninety minutes of being given the notice to proceed by the HERO operator. What we've seen is that when you compare similar incidents from 2007 to 2008, the TRIP program cut an average of 163 minutes per incident off the roadway clearance time. The benefits are obvious, especially when you consider that a major incident can cost \$360,000 in lost time during peak hours. It also cuts down on the possibility of a secondary incident; studies have shown that for every one minute of lane blockage, the chances of a secondary incident increase by 2.8 percent.

Q & A

TODD LONG

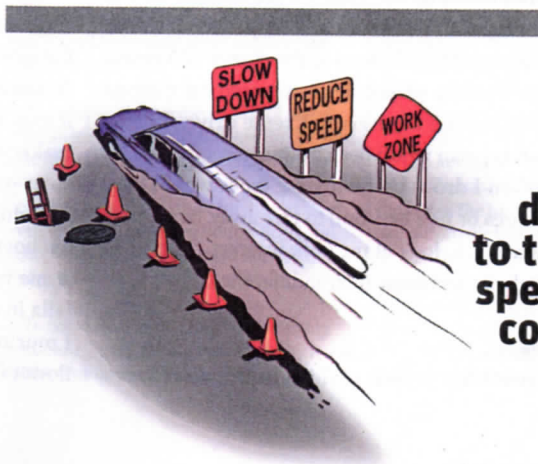
TODD LONG KNOWS MORE ABOUT GEORGIA TRAFFIC than any sane person should. He is the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority's deputy director of business operations and also spent eighteen years working for the Georgia Department of Transportation. Long recently took time to share his insight—while stuck in a traffic jam.

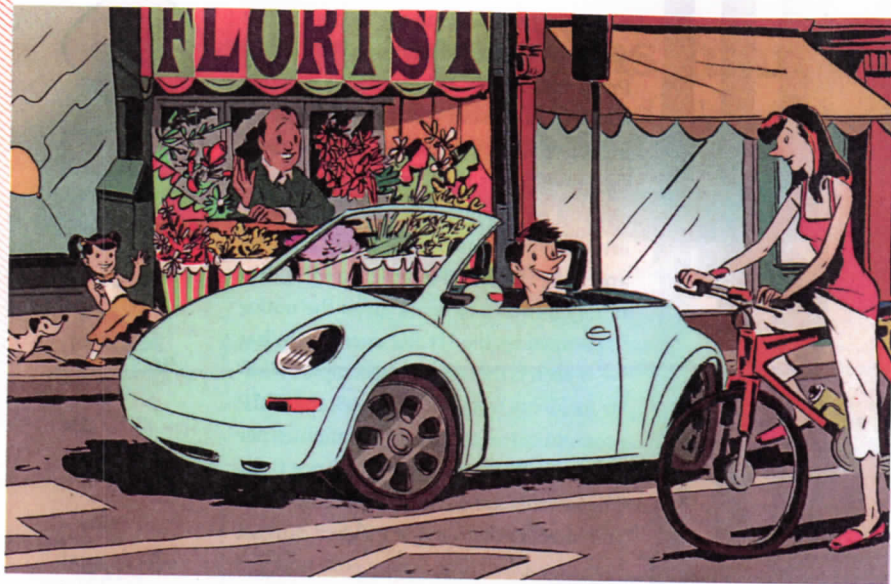
Be honest. Is there any hope for Atlanta's traffic system? There's always hope! One of the big problems is that there hasn't been any significant expansion since before the Olympics. The problem is that there's simply not enough money to maintain what we've got now over the next ten to twenty years, to say nothing of developing new roads. And since expansion is so difficult and expensive, what the state is working on is demand management. If we've got six lanes to work with, how do we better manage those six lanes?

How is the management of the lanes being improved? One demand management tool that GRTA is involved

What can we expect in the long term? We need to manage the demand by maximizing capacity, and for that reason you're not going to see much, if any, expansion being devoted to single-occupancy cars in the future. We also need to get the trucks out of Atlanta. Anyone going north-south or east-west across the state has to go through Atlanta, and that just adds to our problems. We need to develop a new road that connects Macon and Chattanooga but bypasses Atlanta.

So what's the worst-case scenario? Three-hour commutes? Long commutes, yes, but the worst-case scenario is that companies decide that it's not worth the investment to put money into Atlanta or keep a presence here when their employees can't get to work. We want to do everything we can to keep that hopelessness from taking hold.





BABY, CAN I DRIVE YOUR CAR?

THE GUY IN THE VW BUG BESIDE YOU is waving madly, trying to merge. Do you let him? What if he were in a car worth twice your annual salary? Our intrepid driver finds out how four different sets of wheels fare on Atlanta's (sometimes) mean streets.

1991 Chevrolet Astro Van

Old vans are good for plenty of things—carpools, makeshift living (and loving) spaces, high school art projects involving small objects and lots of glue—but not for attracting envy or respect. The dented old van, affectionately known by its Ansley Park owners as The Dustbuster and Blueberry, was acknowledged only when it stalled at an intersection. The guy selling flowers at the corner of Monroe and Piedmont—where it briefly played dead—ignored my distress signals. Later, as I was leaving the Krispy Kreme drive-thru on Ponce de Leon, a homeless man who'd been asking other drivers for money just nodded when I drove by. Switching lanes would have been easier if I'd had flares or free Red Bull to give away. Same with getting the women I passed to look at me with interest. Still, I had plenty of room to stretch out and enjoy their indifference.

2007 BMW M6 Coupe

This midlife-crisis machine, which resides in Buckhead, is a

race car with a sophisticated (if slightly repressed) personality. It is not silver, it's *titanium*. It has not eight cylinders—enough for most speed junkies—but *ten*. You get the idea. Driving by the flower guy again, I was hailed like a 747 at Hartsfield-Jackson. I bought a flower for the trophy wife I anticipated attracting and continued down Monroe. Changing lanes was easy, but only because of the 500 horses under the hood. Folks weren't keen on giving me, the presumed asshole in the \$100,000 car, any help or direction (“why don't you use your onboard GPS?” one man snarled). I didn't blame them but was saddened to once again find myself alone. Feeling beyond the comforts of Krispy Kreme, I drove to a gentlemen's club on Cheshire Bridge, where I was warmly

received by the valet. The machine was, unfortunately, parked out front. Should have taken the van.

2006 Toyota Highlander Hybrid SUV

Driving around Buckhead's Hummer-patrolled streets in a non-American hybrid is one thing . . . but a Toyota hybrid with an Obama bumper sticker? Subversive! Heading north on Peachtree, I spotted an Escalade with a McCain sticker and asked directions to Manuel's Tavern. The driver had never heard of it. I cut my losses and drove to the nearby Capital Grille, a great place to catch *The O'Reilly Factor* with the boys. I took satisfaction in cutting off a Chevy Tahoe vying for a parking spot near the door and was pretty sure I heard the driver mutter “typical” as I walked by. Back on the road, I took a spin down Boulevard hoping to square off against some lowriders. Unable to find any, I stopped at a gas station, where an attendant who offered to pump my gas asked, “How many miles a gallon you get?” “Just 19,” I replied. “Well,” he said, “at least you're trying.”

2006 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible

This car comes with a little flower vase beside the steering wheel, so I gave my fickle friend on the corner of Monroe and Piedmont more business. He received me kindly this time. I also received far more friendly stares from passersby in the Ansley Mall area. Apparently, the Bug is impossibly likeable, no matter the cynic it may harbor. Its Decatur owner said it's even more of a friend-maker with the top down, but it was too cold—and I was too insecure—to try it. At The Varsity, I parked and ate my Frosted Orange and chili cheese dog beside a pickup truck with a couple of good old boys who'd made the trip up from Butler, Georgia. They looked at me with a mixture of sympathy and disdain. “I've never seen a fella in one of them before,” one said to the other. “It's not mine,” I murmured. “But it drives well.” He wasn't satisfied: “Who's the flower for?” Long story. —CHARLES BETHEA

Daily Dose of Depressing News

Here metro Atlanta's annual traffic fatalities and serious injuries are broken down by county.

County	Fatalities	Serious Injuries
Fulton	117	959
Gwinnett	80	377
DeKalb	78	393
Cobb	62	235
Clayton	34	142
Henry	25	106
Cherokee	21	87
Douglas	20	91
Rockdale	15	54
Fayette	7	4

Metro Atlanta's Most Dangerous Intersections

- Old Dixie Highway at Upper Riverdale Road (Clayton)**
64 injuries, 1 serious
- Tara Boulevard at Mt. Zion Road (Clayton)**
47 injuries, 1 serious
- Buford Drive at Satellite Boulevard (Gwinnett)**
45 injuries, 2 serious
- Northside Drive at Hampton Street (Fulton)**
44 injuries, 4 serious
- Lawrenceville Highway at North Druid Hills Road (DeKalb)**, 43 injuries, 1 serious
- Gwinnett GA 317 at Satellite Boulevard (Gwinnett)**, 42 injuries, 1 serious
- Cobb Parkway at Windy Hill Road (Cobb)**
41 injuries, 0 serious
- Grayson Highway at Scenic Highway (Gwinnett)**
41 injuries, 0 serious
- Covington Highway at Panola Road (DeKalb)**
40 injuries, 1 serious
- Indian Trail-Lilburn Road at Oakbrook Parkway (Gwinnett)**, 40 injuries, 4 serious

Metro Atlanta's Deadliest Intersections

- Cruse Road at Pleasant Hill Road (Gwinnett)**
2 fatalities
- Cobb Parkway at Bells Ferry Road (Cobb)**
2 fatalities
- Piedmont Avenue at Fulton CS 3694-03 (Fulton)**
2 fatalities
- Browns Mill Road at Evans Mill Road (DeKalb)**
2 fatalities
- Gwinnett County Road 18 at Peachtree Industrial Boulevard (Gwinnett)**, 2 fatalities
- Covington Highway at Mercer Road (DeKalb)**
2 fatalities
- Spalding Drive at Nesbit Ferry Road (Fulton)**
2 fatalities

All statistics based on averages of the last two years of available data from the Georgia Department of Transportation.



SURVEY

46% experience road rage.

65% are more likely to use profanity when they're alone.

50% have made an obscene gesture at another driver.

"I make them inside my car where no one can see them. I make them at bumper stickers I don't agree with or at slow drivers."

Counties with the worst drivers (according to survey respondents):
Fulton 9%
Gwinnett 8%
Clayton 4%
DeKalb 4%
Cobb 3%

70% think drivers from one county have

about the same skill level as drivers from any other.
 "Bad drivers are not confined to one area. They are free to terrorize anywhere."

28% believe seniors are the worst drivers on the road.

16% believe teens are the worst drivers.

9% believe women are the worst drivers.

56% believe their driving would be rated "better than average by other drivers."

51% use their horn to show anger.

10% use their horn to prevent pedestrians from crossing in front of them.

9% do not consider themselves to be courteous drivers.

ROADS LESS TRAVELED

Atlanta is a maze of cul-de-sacs, dead ends, and traffic jams—but you do have options. Try these reader-recommended shortcuts.

» To get to the airport when the typical I-85 route is backed up, hop on I-285 and take Exit 2 (Camp Creek Parkway) south. It may double your mileage, but if the congestion is bad enough, it'll still save you some time.

» To bypass a brief blockage on I-20W during rush hour, one reader says, "I get off on the Boulevard exit [59-A] but do not exit. I pop back onto the highway for a quick second just to get off on Hill Street, which is the next one."

» To get from Marietta to Douglasville without relying on I-285 or I-20, take Powder Springs Road down to 278, turn left on 78/Bankhead Highway, then turn left again on Campbellton Street.

» To get to Perimeter Mall during heavy congestion on the highways, try Peachtree to either Roswell Road or, if that's packed, Peachtree Dunwoody Road north to Perimeter Center.

» To get from the northeast side of metro Atlanta (e.g., Northlake/Tucker) to the west side (e.g., Smyrna/Vinings), skip the freeways. Instead, take Lavista Road, which becomes Lindbergh, then jog over to West Wesley, which becomes Bolton Road and gets you to Atlanta Road and South Cobb Drive/280.

» To get to Buckhead from Cobb County without I-75, try taking Powers Ferry Road all the way down to Roswell Road.

A WORD TO THE WISE

There's more than one way to reduce the cost of your commute. Proceed with caution in these speed-trap hot spots (reported by our readers) to save money and a run-in with an unhappy trooper.

- » Peachtree Industrial Northbound, just past I-285
- » Highway 78 near South Gwinnett High School
- » I-75 between Howell Mill and Cumberland (cited by multiple sources)
- » Roswell Road between Glenridge Drive and I-285
- » South Cobb Drive at Wade Ford and Emory Adventist Hospital
- » I-75 at Delk Road
- » I-75 at Cleveland Avenue
- » I-20 at Candler Road
- » Scott Boulevard and Clairmont Road (eager red light camera)
- » Holcomb Bridge, heading west just before GA 400 (Roswell officer is said to hide behind a tree branch just before the Dunkin' Donuts during morning rush, when traffic often goes 60 or more in a 45 zone.)
- » Sugarloaf Parkway in front of Discover Mills
- » Peachtree Industrial Boulevard near the Chamblee Lowes
- » The intersection at Windy Hill Road and Cobb Parkway in Marietta (reported to be one of the top moneymakers in the state for automatic traffic camera fines)
- » I-20 from Columbia Drive to Moreland Avenue
- » Beaver Ruin Road in Norcross, half a mile south of Buford Highway (Officers hide in the parking lot of the Methodist church and/or dentist's office.)

HOT WHEELS

WANT TO GET HIGH-END GERMAN ENGINEERING without draining your savings account? it is possible. In a showdown between an S-Class sedan and a Smart car (both by Mercedes-Benz), the little guy will not only save you seventy-five grand or more on the dealer's lot, it'll also use its 33 city/41 highway mileage to take at least \$1,000 from your gas tank and put it into your wallet if you're an average 20,000-mile-a-year driver. Plus, only a puppy snuggling with a teddy bear in a field of daisies is cuter than this car; no wonder more than a million Smart cars have been sold in thirty-seven countries. While it's illegal in Georgia—and most places outside of Europe—to park perpendicular to a curb on the street, the mini mobile's 8.8-foot length will help you squeeze into even the most diminutive spot and take the intimidation factor out of parallel parking. Its mostly recyclable body weighs just 1,500 pounds, but the 2008 ForTwo's steel safety shell helped it earn the highest ratings for front and side crashworthiness from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, and the car has been shown to hold up as well as other subcompacts in high-speed crashes.



The Best Car for Your Commute

YOU MIGHT NOT THINK A recession is the smartest time to invest in a new car, but if you're looking for a deal, you should think again. With auto sales at a twenty-six-year low, dealers are desperate and bargains abound. We asked automotive experts to recommend the best vehicles for Atlantans.

For long-haul commuters

An automatic transmission is the way to go for Atlanta commuters, who face daily stop-and-go traffic. Other big concerns are comfort and fuel efficiency. Mark Scott, senior manager of Atlanta-based AutoTrader.com, says, "If you're looking for the kind of options that might mitigate the misery of being stuck on GA 400, crawling along at five miles an hour, consider cars that offer premium seats (built-in heat, adjustable levels of firmness and support) and good sound systems (high-end speakers, multi-CD players, MP3 player inputs, HD or satellite radio)." **Suggestions:** Honda

Accord (\$20,775+), Toyota Camry (\$19,145+), Lexus ES (\$34,320+)

For intown dwellers

For hip, urban ITPers, "city cars" are the way to go. They offer good city mileage, look cool, and have small footprints, making them easy to navigate and park on city streets. "When you're driving down Peachtree or Piedmont, sometimes it can feel like the driver next to you is actually in your lap," says Scott. "These cars offer style, maneuverability, and convenience for that kind of city driving." **Suggestions:** Honda Fit (\$14,550+), Ford Focus (\$14,995+), Smart car (\$11,590+)

For families with children

Best Life named Atlanta one of the top 100 spots to raise a family (sixty-first), so you're in the right place. Now you've just got to find a way to get the kids around. "We're talking convenience and roominess, certainly something that you can load things in the back,"

says Garrett Townsend, district manager of AAA Auto Club South. But that doesn't mean you have to cave and buy a minivan.

Go for a crossover that has a car platform and the roominess—and nooks and crannies—of an SUV without the brutal mpg.

Suggestions: Ford Edge (\$26,130+), Toyota RAV4 (\$21,500+), Mazda CX-7 (\$23,900+)

For single people

When you don't have to worry about car seats, coupes and sports cars can be pretty attractive, says Cars.com Senior Editor David Thomas.

"[Single people] can look at convertibles and sportier cars that may be slightly impractical yet still are very good cars." Plus, Chicago-based Thomas points out that our city's balmy weather means we can drive anything we want. "In Atlanta, you're not going to get that icy snow, so a rear-wheel-drive sports car can be in the mix, and convertibles are practically year-round cars."

Suggestions: BMW 3 Series (\$33,400+), Mazda Miata (\$21,305+), Audi TT (\$35,200+)



90%
have eaten a meal
while driving.



SURVEY

11%
frequently eat while driving.
"I'm a great multitasker. Although I've seen my passengers squirm, grab their seat handles, and put on their invisible brakes."

11%
think eating while driving should be illegal.

27%
apply makeup or fix their hair while driving.

40%
think grooming while

driving should be illegal.

72%
wouldn't dream of reading while driving.

22%
program their GPS while driving.

44%
think programming a GPS while driving should be illegal.

48%
frequently talk on the phone while driving.

59%
rarely or never use a hands-free device.

25%
think talking on the phone while driving should be illegal.

HOW TO SPEND LESS ON GAS

» Putting the pedal to the metal uses as much as 33 percent more gas than driving at a steady speed, and the faster you're going, the more wind resistance you need to overcome. Save as much as fifty-three cents a gallon by taking control of your lead foot.
» Dirty spark plugs and filters are bad for your wallet as well as your

wheels. Putting off a tune-up can cost nine to twenty-three cents a gallon.

» Those squishy tires aren't doing you any favors either. Check your air pressure regularly. Every pound per square inch (psi) below the recommended psi reduces your car's fuel efficiency by 0.4 percent and costs you about seven cents per gallon.

» Drive clockwise. Really. As much as possible, plan your route to avoid left turns. Atlanta shipping giant UPS saved 3 million gallons of gas in 2007 by developing a system that helped its drivers choose routes that favored right turns and thus reduced the time they spent idling while waiting to turn. Get rid of a wait at just one pesky light during your daily drive and save as much as \$180.

» Use the web. Find the cheapest go-juice on atlantagasprices.com and, provided you don't have to drive ten miles out of your way to get it, you could save fifty bucks or more a year. Finding a carpool partner on myridesmart.com will halve your gas and parking expenses. Check in with georgia-navigator.com to avoid fuel-sappers such as backups, accidents, and construction zones.

DEATH ON WEST PEACHTREE

How road rage spiraled into tragedy

ROAD RAGE CLEARLY WAS TO BLAME, but otherwise the jury was deadlocked.

So last fall, the district attorney decided not to retry Charles Anthony Key, twenty-seven, for fatally shooting Jack Snook, twenty-four, in the face. Their vehicles crossed paths at a Midtown traffic light around 4:30 in the morning. Details remain fuzzy, but everyone agrees that horns were honked, profanities volleyed, and middle fingers extended pointedly. Then Snook, who had been to a nightclub with his wife and some friends, leapt from his passenger's seat and vaulted toward the other vehicle, where Key sat with a gun.

This sort of "mutually combative situation," as investigators ruefully described it, is increasingly common on Atlanta's asphalt. Just three years ago, the city was ranked the fifth most courteous in the country according to the annual "In the Driver's Seat Road Rage Survey." However, the most recent study judged Atlanta the sixth *least* courteous, in the surly company of Boston and Miami. In fact, Atlanta is number one in reports of obscene gestures among motorists.

So much for Southern hospitality.

"The city's reputation for its charming, mannerly, genteel culture needs to be held up to a mirror—the rearview mirror—because it flies in the face of what we've found out," says Todd Smith of Auto-Vantage, which commissioned the survey.

Several factors led to this jarring U-turn, most involving the 1990s population boom of suburban commuters. Atlanta was born from transportation expediencies—its original, railroad-inspired name was "Terminus"—with civil engineering that eschewed Euclidean grids for whatever pell-mell pig trails were handiest. Consequently, commuting, with all of its competitive lane-merging, involves migratory patterns as Darwinian as the Serengeti's.

The phenomenon of road rage can be traced as far back as ancient Rome, though, when laws were passed to control reckless chariots. So why the revved-up rudeness now? "Cell phone use while driving is considered the number one trigger of road rage nationally, and Atlanta leads all of the other major cities in that category," Smith says, adding that these multitaskers also tend to eat, shave, apply mascara, and even "digi-neck," or photograph accidents. "Atlanta should change its 'city too busy to hate' moniker to 'the city too busy to drive.'"

Moreover, thanks in part to Georgia's increasingly permissive gun laws, motorists are packing more than iPhones. When that Hummer cuts you off on I-285, pause to remember that loaded guns can legally be stashed anywhere in a Georgia vehicle—without a permit.

"People's personalities change when they get behind the wheel," says Lieutenant Paul Cospser of the Georgia State Patrol. "The meek turn aggressive. If another driver honks and gestures colorfully, don't make eye contact and don't speed to get away. Let them go on, but report their whole license plate number to us."

A cabbie at a nearby hotel did just that on April 3, 2005, recording Key's plates as he fled the Midtown shooting. Ironically, Snook had just returned home from an eventful tour as a Marine in Iraq, where he survived one bullet wound, only to be felled by another on West Peachtree Street. He died in his wife's arms and left a seven-year-old daughter behind. —CANDICE DYER

SLOW GOING

BEFORE fastening that seat belt, be sure you know what you're getting yourself into. Here are the busiest times for some of the city's major thoroughfares.* Avoid them if you can... and for God's sake, stay off the roads at 5:30 p.m.



7:30 a.m.
I-75 Southbound (north of I-285) slows to 33 mph.
I-85 Southbound (north of I-285) slows to 35 mph.
I-285 Eastbound (from I-75 to GA 400) slows to 42 mph.

7:45 a.m.
I-285 Northbound (from I-20 to US 78) slows to 32 mph.
I-20 Westbound (from I-285 to Connector)



slows to 45 mph.
8 a.m.
GA 400 Southbound (north of I-285) slows to 28 mph.
I-285 Northbound (from US 78 to I-85) slows to 35 mph.

8:15 a.m.
I-75 Northbound (from I-85 to I-20) slows to 25 mph.

8:30 a.m.
I-285 Westbound



(from I-85 to GA 400) slows to 35 mph.

4:45 p.m.
I-75 Northbound (from I-85 to I-285) slows to 43 mph.

5:15 p.m.
Connector Southbound (from split to I-20) slows to 29 mph.

5:30 p.m.
I-285 Southbound (from I-85 to US 78) slows to 22 mph.



I-285 Eastbound (from GA 400 to I-85) slows to 24 mph.
I-85 Northbound (north of I-285) slows to 29 mph.
I-75 Northbound (north of I-285) slows to 33 mph.
I-285 Westbound (from GA 400 to I-75) slows to 33 mph.
Connector Northbound (from I-20 to split) slows to 39 mph.
I-85 Southbound (from I-285 to I-75)



slows to 45 mph.
I-285 Southbound (from US 78 to I-20) slows to 47 mph.

5:45 p.m.
GA 400 Northbound (north of I-285) slows to 25 mph.

*Figures based on four most recent years available from Georgia Department of Transportation historical data.

HIGHWAY GUARDIANS

A PICKUP SMASHES INTO a state patrol cruiser on a gray winter Tuesday at the front edge of afternoon rush hour, on the south-bound Connector just north of the Corey tower. Nobody is hurt, but it causes a spectacle. Drivers have trouble passing crashes without turning their heads, so what do we get? *Pop*—chain reaction. Not fifty yards away, a distracted woman in a Toyota Camry plows into a Chevy Caprice, which lurches into the bumper of another truck.

Within minutes, the HERO trucks have arrived. They're fat and yellow, like giant rolling sticks of butter. They show up on command, dispatched by someone in a sunless room off Confederate Avenue, where technicians monitor more than 400 cameras perched above the interstate highways of metro Atlanta. The staff's technical title is Highway Emergency Response Operator, HERO for short. No need to pay them. You already did, with your taxes: a starting wage of about \$29,000 a year for certified HEROs.

Two yellow-vested men see the second crash and walk into the highway. They make eye contact with each driver, raising their right hands, slowing the vehicles to a stop. This is their fundamental paradox: to clear the blockage, they must temporarily exacerbate it.

The two HEROs, Tim Broome and Robert Sims, direct the three newly damaged vehicles to the triangular strip between the road and exit ramp. Sims, a thirty-five-year-old supervisor, has seen stranger things than this in his seven years on the job. Once two men in a Range Rover who wanted to haul a king-size mattress tried to hold it against the roof with one free hand each. They failed, and it flew into the road. They kept driving. Once a poultry truck lost its load on Spaghetti Junction. Sims spent a good long time chasing chickens, then had to call the fire department to wash away the blood and feathers.

A tow truck arrives to haul away the cruiser. It needs one to two more lanes. This means Sims must wade back into the metal stream and dam it completely. He gets back into his truck and drives away, leaving Broome to handle the aftermath.



Robert Sims

The eighty-six HEROs made 85,000 assists around metro Atlanta last year. They changed blown tires. They poured gas into empty tanks. They nudged stalled vehicles to the shoulder with their non-scuffing rubber bumpers. They righted eighteen-wheelers with J-hooks and logging chains. Each drove an average of 200 miles per day.

HEROs often reach desperate drivers before ambulances. They are trained to deliver babies and use portable defibrillators to shock hearts back into rhythm. Sims has been to numerous fatal crashes and thinks often about the five people who have died in his arms.

In the cab of his truck, a message crackles on the radio: another crash on the Connector. Three more cars mangled. "Probably a cell phone involved in there somewhere," he says. —THOMAS LAKE

It Happened to Me

WE ASKED READERS, "What is the most outrageous thing that has happened while you were driving?"

» "In the rain, I did a 180-degree hydroplane and ended up perfectly between two cars that were barely a car's length away from each other."
» "A woman with one foot on the dashboard and talking on the phone rear-ended me. She was a 'doctor' and didn't 'have time' to wait for the police."

» "I was hit head-on by a drunk driver. He broke my femur, both knees, both ankles, and nose. I lost my sales job and was out of work for a year. The guy who hit me spent three hours in jail, then went home and continued on with his life."
» "I was mooned by a fat guy on the highway."

» "I was in a gridlock just out of Georgia into South Carolina one evening and the guy in the next car got out, completely stripped, and then put on shorts and a T-shirt."
» "[I was] intentionally rear-ended when I wouldn't let someone turn right on red in front of me amidst a busy intersection."
» "An eighteen-wheeler hit me, slammed me into a wall, and drove off like nothing happened."
» "A woman followed me to my office and threatened to run me over because I gave her the finger."

» "An escaped convict tried to get in my car at a stoplight when I was a teenager."
» "Someone threw a screwdriver at my car and shattered my back window when I was driving down I-85."
» "A woman passed me while eating fried chicken. She wrecked while rounding a curve in front of me."
» "There was a man driving somewhat slowly and erratically on the interstate; I finally decided to pass him, and when I did, I saw the reason why: On the driver's left arm was a full-grown turquoise parrot."

OFF THE GRID

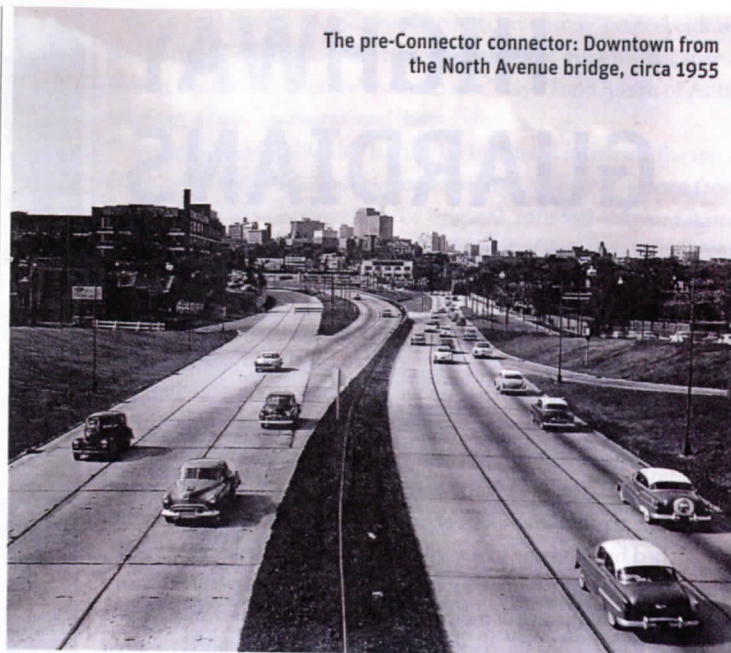
How our roads and traffic got so out of hand

ATLANTA DIDN'T START OUT WITH a transportation plan. There was no grid system like those in older cities or newer planned cities, and that deficiency continues to contribute to the region's infamous traffic snarls.

The city's streets evolved from primitive trails stomped out by Creek Indians. Near the confluence of Peachtree Creek and the Chattahoochee River, the Creeks had a village, Standing Peachtree, which was served by a network of trails. One major trail split where Buckhead is now located. Another branch headed south, often along a high ridge, to what is now Five Points; today, that trail is called Peachtree Street. It changes to Peachtree Road north of the Brookwood Station and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard around Brookhaven.

There's disagreement about whether "Peachtree" was derived from "peach tree" or from "pitch tree" (pine), but one thing's certain: The number of streets bearing the name—more than seventy—causes no small amount of confusion. Late historian Franklin Garrett noted that "Peachtree" is "so closely associated with Atlanta that it is almost a municipal landmark."

As if the multitude of Peachtrees weren't enough to bewilder motorists, many Atlanta streets seem to change names willy-nilly. The reasons, in some cases, date back to the era of segregation. White residents on Monroe Drive, for example, didn't want to be associated with black resi-



The pre-Connector connector: Downtown from the North Avenue bridge, circa 1955

dents on Boulevard, so the street changes names at Ponce de Leon Avenue.

The civil rights era birthed more-positive name changes. City Council often renamed existing streets to honor heroes. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive was formerly Hunter Street. Ralph McGill Boulevard was renamed for the crusading newspaper publisher; it was previously known as Forrest Avenue in honor of Nathan Bedford Forrest, Confederate general and a founder of the Ku Klux Klan.

IN SPITE OF ITS LACK of transportation planning, Atlanta didn't get off to a bad start. In the mid-fifties, the city began pouring a four-lane highway between The Varsity and Georgia Tech, so it was first in line when President Eisenhower started his interstate highway system in 1956. Since then, that budding stretch of highway has blossomed into the Downtown Connector. When the federal government started funding transit systems, Atlanta was first in line again, pushed by then-Alderman Sam Massell, who later became mayor. MARTA was under way.

But progress was soon replaced

by sprawl. The 1950s also marked the beginning of the automobile age, and our young city wholeheartedly embraced the car. World War II veterans settled into jobs and started families. They, along with thousands of others, snapped up shiny new cars and headed for the suburbs, where they could buy big houses with big yards to go with their big engines. The ease of zooming around on the freeways led people to buy homes fifty miles or more from the city. Without an existing subway line in Atlanta, the state and counties rushed to build roads to accommodate the movement. During this time, white Atlantans, fearful of integration, began fleeing the city. According to Kevin M. Kruse, author of *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, 30,000 whites abandoned Atlanta between 1957 and 1962; 60,000 during the sixties; and 100,000 during the seventies.

After fleeing to the suburbs, many white voters didn't want black MARTA riders in their counties, so while the new interstate highway system connected the suburbs to the city, MARTA was never extended beyond the borders of Fulton



STREET SMARTS ←



SURVEY

39%
have never sent a text message while driving.

77%
think text messaging while driving should be illegal.

"[It's] really difficult, but I do it every day. It has been the cause of some close calls."

26%
check their e-mail while driving.

62%
do not support the idea of replacing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes with high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes (see page 62).

20%
would be willing to pay between 5 and 25 cents in the new HOT lanes to reduce their commute by 10 minutes.

8%
would be willing to pay more than \$1 to reduce their commute by 10 minutes.

Not everyone hates commuting. Several respondents actually (gasp!) enjoy their daily routine.

Among other things, they love the "pretty drive through Dunwoody and Sandy Springs," "not having to sing preschool songs," "not having to fight my teenager over the radio," "seeing the city at the most beautiful times of day," "time alone," "my carpool buddy," and "listen[ing] to loud music."

AFTER THE FREEWAYS were "freed," transportation planners focused on moving the traffic expected for the 1996 Olympics, implementing carpool lanes on intown freeways and a massive temporary bus system that lasted from July 19 to August 4. State, city, and county officials worked together, and the plan succeeded magnificently. Today, we still benefit from aspects of the Olympic transportation legacy such as carpool lanes and a sophisticated traffic control center.

Throughout the decades, an obsession with building roads has been the region's Achilles' heel. Leaders ignored alternatives and often didn't even bother to put up sidewalks or signs that made sense. State leaders blocked efforts to use gas tax money for anything but roads.

Eventually, traffic grew so congested in the suburbs that people began moving back into the city. Between 2005 and 2006, the city added 9,500 people, its largest increase in more than thirty years. Still, nobody with any clout came up with big ideas, and metro Atlanta's traffic has gotten exponentially worse.

More than twelve years ago, this nightmare was predicted in *Grid-shock*, a series by *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter David Goldberg. Now communications director of Transportation for America, Goldberg wrote that the city's traffic woes stemmed from "fifty years of development patterns designed to serve not people but the automobile." His predictions, including increasing gridlock and a temporary cutoff of federal road funds (as a result of the city's failure to curb excess auto emissions), have all come to pass. And very little has changed. He pointed out that the Atlanta region had a plan for the interstates and for MARTA, but not for what came next. It still doesn't. The sad fact is that it may simply be too late.

—DOUG MONROE

and DeKalb counties. The lack of a far-reaching commuter rail system continues to overwork the metro area's highways. To make matters worse, MARTA has never received state operating assistance funding—though the state does provide minimal capital financial assistance in the form of a partial match to federal grants. MARTA struggles with financial shortfalls today.

In 1969, to cope with continuing suburban growth, Georgia opened a perimeter highway, I-285, which quickly morphed from a bypass to a main street. By the seventies, the overtaxed four-lane version of the Connector was carrying more than 100,000 vehicles every day—twice what it was designed to handle.

When Atlanta's starter freeway system (I-75, I-85, I-20, and I-285) bogged down with traffic, the state Department of Transportation simply built it again during the eighties' multi-billion-dollar Freeing the Freeways project, which doubled the metro area's interstate lane miles. During that

TIME CAPSULE Atlanta, and by extension *Atlanta* magazine, has been concerned about traffic for decades. This photo ran in the magazine's first issue in May 1961 and was accompanied by a caption that read, "No other section of the Atlanta expressway system has caused so much trouble as the downtown connector, shown in this retouched photo. This costly monster will connect all expressways, giving entry and exit into downtown from any direction. All right-of-way has been secured, but problems continue to plague the project. The total cost, when complete, will be approximately \$23,000,000, including money already spent on right-of-way. No definite date has been set for letting of the contract—and no one is speculating as to when it will be done. Best bet for completion: 1965 at least."

decade, an average of 61,788 people a year moved into the region, increasing to 69,100 during the nineties. "Atlanta is probably the fastest-growing of any metropolitan area in the history of the world," analyst Christopher Leinberger said in the 1990s. The city soon became the poster child for sprawl—and the inevitable traffic glut that followed in its wake.

TRAFFIC CHALLENGE

SEVEN ATLANTA MAGAZINE STAFFERS, six ways to get from Downtown to Lenox Square, one rainy winter day. Who will prevail?

Sheri on the MARTA train, 27 minutes

I walked to the closest MARTA station, Peachtree Center. Right on cue, the Doraville train arrived as I reached the platform. My trip was easy: fifteen minutes spent talking to my mom, reading, and politely refusing to buy a \$5 scarf and glove set from a man walking from car to car with his wares. I got off the train at the Lenox Station and walked across to the mall. **Advantages** No traffic or road rage. And I actually got some shopping done while I waited for the others. **Disadvantages** There was a short walk in the rain to get to the mall, but I was prepared with raincoat, boots, and umbrella. **Convenience 8 Speed 10 Cost 6 (\$1.75) Comfort 5 Overall 7**

Amanda in a taxi, 27 minutes

After calling two local taxi services only to receive no answer, I went to find a cab on foot. Luckily, there were plenty lined up alongside Downtown's Hyatt Regency. I hopped into a Rapid Taxi driven by the cheerful Konte Younousse, and he took off, merrily speeding up I-85 in the HOV lane as I read in the backseat—until we hit a traffic jam on 400. As we inched past a blue car with a newly smashed fender, Konte apologized several times, all the while singing quietly to "Brass in Pocket"—an added value I could've done without. But when he let me out right at a Lenox entrance, I forgave his lackluster Chrissie Hynde impression; not having to negotiate mall parking is a freedom I haven't enjoyed since mom dropped me off as a teen. **Advantages** Speedy HOV lane benefits, no parking hassles. **Disadvantages** Cha-ching! Unless you're car-less and allergic to public transit, \$25 (including tip) isn't worth it. **Convenience 9 Speed 10 Cost 1 (\$25) Comfort 7 Overall 6**

Caroline taking surface streets, 2000 Honda CRV, 35 minutes

I was glad I was taking Peachtree Street because I hate driving on the highway when it's raining. As I pulled out of the parking deck, I thought I had a good chance of getting there first. I was feeling pretty good, people-watching and singing to the radio. Then, as I stopped

for the fourth time, I remembered how many lights there are on Peachtree, and by the time I rounded the corner near Lenox, I had caught almost all of them. **Advantages** The comfort of being in my own car. **Disadvantages** Frustrating red lights. **Convenience 8 Speed 8 Cost 8 (approximately 65 cents) Comfort 10 Overall 8**

Elizabeth and Kimberly driving normal highway speeds with HOV lanes, 2005 Toyota Corolla, 36 minutes

Our two-man status allowed us to use the HOV ramp from Williams Street to the Connector, though at that time of day it was more about feeling special than saving time. An accident brought traffic to a halt along the ramp between I-85 and 400, just beyond the point where you'd be able to see the brake lights from 85 and decide not to exit. When my low-fuel indicator flicked on, I became very twitchy indeed. **Advantages** Comfort plus the distraction of radio tunes and friendly conversation. **Disadvantages** Being a slave to traffic, using gas. **Convenience 8 Speed 8 Cost 9 (approximately 45 cents) Comfort 10 Overall 9**

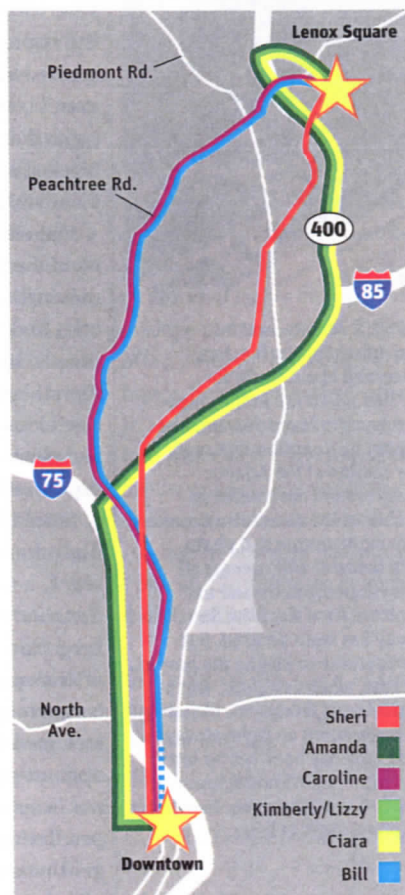
Ciara driving at the posted speed limit, 2003 Honda Accord, 40 minutes

I felt like I was in a race. Unfortunately, when I reached the parking garage, I discovered not everyone was in such a hurry. The parking attendant took his time assisting another driver who was blocking the exit. I anticipated sluggish traffic because of the weather, but things moved surprisingly well until I was stopped by a wreck on my exit. After a ten-minute wait, I was on my way. **Advantages** No chance of getting a speeding ticket. **Disadvantages** It felt very slow. I mean, who really drives the speed limit in Atlanta? **Convenience 8 Speed 7 Cost 9 (approximately 46 cents) Comfort 10 Overall 8**

Bill on The Peach (MARTA bus), 68 minutes

Left the office ten minutes behind the group, then walked fifteen minutes in the rain to the North Avenue stop (half hoping it would be early for the 10:31 pickup so I'd miss it). Alas, I arrived at 10:24 and the bus was on the dot.

The seats were wet but the bus was pretty empty until the Arts Center stop, where it filled with wet travelers. As we passed Piedmont Hospital, I was concussed by the blast when a largish woman behind me failed to cover her sneeze. Arrived at Lenox covered in germs—but only two minutes behind schedule. **Advantages** It's a public transit alternative that's less claustrophobic than the train and allows lots (and lots) of time for reading. Okay, and it did run on time. **Disadvantages** Stops are so far apart it's not convenient unless you're already at one. **Convenience 3 Speed 1 Cost 6 (\$1.75) Comfort 3 Overall 3**



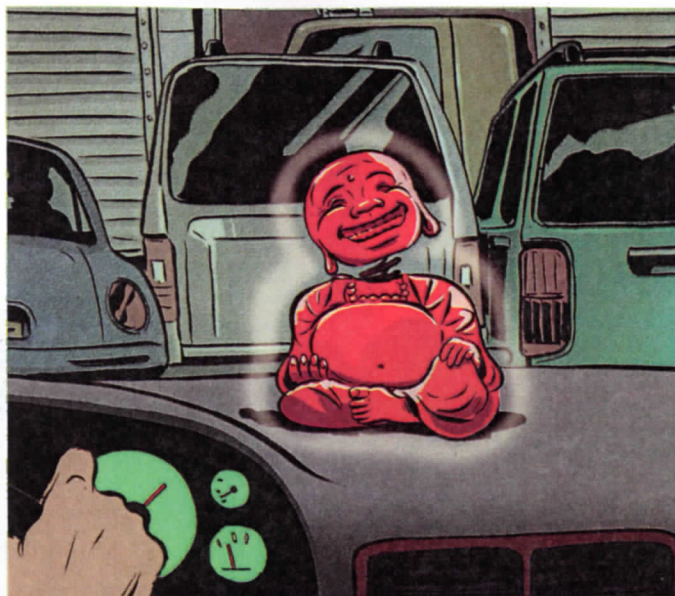
WE'RE WATCHING YOU

THERE ARE SURVEYS, then there's reality. We hit the highways to call you out on what you're *actually* doing behind the wheel.

- » You, goateed guy in the GMC 1500, held your hands-free device while talking. (Tip: It's hands-free. Try it.)
- » You, middle-aged couple in the white Lexus with tinted windows, drove in rush hour and never spoke to each other. (Tip: Try therapy. You're making *us* feel weird.)
- » You, studious young lady in the green Camry, thumbed through a textbook in your passenger seat and read.
- » You, woman in the nice cream Escalade with gold rims, picked your ear, looked at the result, and wove dangerously. (Tip: Try Q-tips. Try them at home.)
- » You, truckers galore, talked on cell phones. (Tip: *Smokey and the Bandit* was about CBs, and it was badass.)
- » You, guy in the neon green Dodge Charger Daytona, drove a neon green car.
- » You, heavysset man in the old-school powder blue Honda, ate a burger at 9:51 a.m. (Request: Tell us where you can get a burger before 10 a.m.)
- » You, attractive blonde in the black Mini Cooper, distracted us.
- » You, construction worker in the white Chevy Astro, picked your nose but didn't look at it or leave your lane.



- » You, businessman in the Mercedes E350, wrote a *loooooong* text message.
- » You, same guy in the Mercedes, saw us watching and awkwardly pretended to be talking on the phone.
- » You, man in the blue Beretta, got the beef out your teeth with a floss stick. (Tip: Keep on fighting the Yuck Mouth.)
- » You, man in the purple Grand Am, laughed heartily at a video on your mobile device.
- » You, ex-Marine in the blue Grand Cherokee, honked at us for slowing to 50 in the 45-mph construction zone. (Tip: Stop being a jerk.)



Zen of Commuting

IF I WERE A CROW, an inkblot on an exhaust-veiled sky, the miles from home to office would be less than four. Asphalt-bound, they're less than five. Yet for thirty minutes or more I sit in commute, working my foot against the brake, accelerating in spasms across the city.

There is not much of the day I'm completely alone, though, but here—albeit at any moment I may be within fifty feet of fifty people, separated only by thin sheets of glass and automobile-shaped metal. On the license plate of the mud-spattered Pathfinder to my right, a tiny bicyclist shouts *Share the Road*, a USA Triathlon sticker just above it. The driver, his left elbow propped on the windowsill, rests his head in his hand, peaceful. *Yeah, he probably needs the break.* A woman with a soft jowl and short, curly brown hair passes in a white Volvo station wagon, looking relaxed—and a little relieved. *Someone just dropped off the kids.* We inch through the congested mess of Briarcliff meeting Ponce, past local landmark “Bicycle Shorts Man,” leaning on his cane, constant as a milestone, his navy blue shorts hugging his endowment. *Good morning!*

Windows are cracked today; it's almost winter, but balmy. A zephyr, three months early and lightly laced with the scent of warm tar, gusts through my sunroof, frizzing my hair happily. Drive-time shtick drifts from the Mazda next door. In my Eclipse, though, the radio idles. The silence is unbroken, save for a muffled honk or the electronic heartbeat of a crosswalk

signal—and that's okay. As I rattle, Freedom to Andy Young to Spring, I'm distracted in reverie, for the route by now is perfectly familiar. My paint-chipped coupe, like an old dappled mare, knows the way with little prodding.

I've got to meet with the wedding planner to pick out invitations; I'll call her at lunch . . . Our editorial meeting's at ten, so I'll schedule my interview for eleven and make it back for another meeting at three. My stomach tightens. *I wonder if I'll ever feel caught up. I just want to sleep. It will all get done; it always does, it always does, it always does . . . Here comes that homeless man again, shuffling with his cardboard “God bless you” . . . I'm so lucky; I should be more thankful. I should really try to make it to church this Sunday . . . Dear God, please protect my brother. The Keular is not enough.*

My eyes are wet.

At a stoplight, I pull up behind what must have been one of the first Geos to roll off the GM assembly line, dirty gray and dinged. Blighting its boxy rump are about a dozen bumper stickers, a vehicular attempt at Zen. *Question reality. Mean people suck. Hatred can only be stilled by non-hatred. Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes. Be the change you want to see in the world. I'd rather be here.*

*I'd rather be here? On this godforsaken stretch of tar? I glance over at the vagrant, now sitting against a tree waiting for the next set of cars to form their lot at Boulevard. Ahead, the Westin with its punched-out teeth looms. A new breeze is captured. *Yes. Yes, I would.* —AMANDA K. BROWN*