



The T-SPLOST - Some last thoughts on its importance

by F.T. Davis

Columnist

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By now you and I have heard all of the arguments. Tuesday we will have the chance to settle the question for our generation, probably.

There has been a lot of grandstanding on all sides. The proposed improvements to our regional transportation system will not cure all traffic jams or permit you or me to ride in our single passenger auto at warp speed from Marietta to the airport for that flight at rush hour.

By the same token, no matter how loudly "no tax" voices shout, we, the citizens of our region, will wind up paying for any transportation we use. We can pay for it, and spend it, close to home (via the TSPLOST) or we can funnel those funds through the state or federal government and hope that 80 percent or 90 percent will come back, for some project which the state or Washington approves.

Worse, without the TSPLOST, our region will not be able to "match" many funds otherwise available from the federal government for our regional transportation projects.

The current vote is for a specific list of transportation projects, specifically for our region, to be started within a specific time window, and with a much more transparent and accountable

system than we have by sending our funds to the state legislature or Congress and hoping that we will get some back for some project, some time. Interestingly, every major project to be paid for by the TSPLOST has been in plans made public, discussed in numerous public meetings, debated, and approved overwhelmingly by our representatives over many years. They were in the Regional Transportation Plans approved on the watches of Chairmen Tim Lee, Sam Olens, Bill Byrne and some of them, all the way back to Chairman Ernest Barrett. The difference this time is they actually will be built in the next decade or so if we approve the TSPLOST.

As the Wall Street Journal noted in an article on our regional referendum earlier this month, some conservative groups claim there is too "heavy an emphasis on public transit" in the project list, while the Sierra Club and the NAACP "complain there isn't enough transit." I figure that means our representatives must have gotten it about right, because we do need both road improvements and better transit in our region. We need to give more of our citizens more choices in transportation.

Here are some facts that often get lost in the rancor and shouting. Take a look at the chart nearby from a respected conservative think tank, the Cato Institute, "Policy Analysis: Ending Congestion by Refinancing Highways":

It shows that if we can gradually create some alternate means of transportation in Cobb and our region at peak travel periods, the result could be a big, positive, "multiplier effect" in speeding up travel. In other words, I-75 works fine so long as there are only, say, 1,400 vehicles in each lane, each hour. Once we add extra vehicles (because we do not have some other way for the folks in those vehicles to travel) not only does traffic slow to a crawl (as we all know by bitter experience), but the snarl lasts for a long time after the actual peak.

Groucho Marx had a routine in which he said “Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?” The folks urging us to vote down TSPLOST say something better will come along (never mind that they don’t know what that is, or when). Maybe they want us to believe everything is great in our transportation system right now. In any event, they want us to believe them rather than our own eyes.

A great regional transportation system right now is not what I see. It’s not what businesses deciding to locate in Charlotte or Dallas instead of here see. Without a regional approach, regional projects and regional funding, it’s hard to believe we are going to have anything other than what we have had for the past 20 years — more congestion, more and worse traffic jams, and jobs drifting off to other regions. Jobs will locate in places which demonstrate in some concrete way that they are at least willing to start to build a 21st century transportation system.

It’s not perfect, but it’s the best chance we will have for a long time. Please consider voting “for” the TSPLOST.

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