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Business Insider

WITH MARIA SAPORTA



Business

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WHAT'S ON THIS PAGE →

The entry titled "Same old urban policies won't work in megaregions," and any of the comments about it.

MARIA SAPORTA - BIO

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Same old urban policies won't work in megaregions

By Maria Saporta | Sunday, July 6, 2008, 02:54 AM

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Back in the 1960s, the federal government focused on the needs of cities — from poverty to housing to transportation.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the suburbs took center stage. More people began moving away from the urban core.

Now a dual phenomenon is under way.

First, people are moving back to urban areas — driven by higher gas prices, traffic congestion and a desire to live closer to where they work and play.

Second, megaregions are emerging.

Megaregions — defined as corridors with several major metro areas with economic ties — have been sprouting throughout our nation and the world.

Metro Atlanta is part of the Piedmont-Atlantic megaregion, which connects Raleigh-Durham to Charlotte to Atlanta and on to Birmingham. The megaregion also includes a host of other cities in the Southeast corridor.

Urban experts now believe the global competitiveness of our regions will depend on how well we provide mobility within these regions and how well we share our limited resources as we grow.

One such expert is Catherine Ross, director of Georgia Tech's Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development. For the past four years, Ross has been studying megaregions — both in the United States and in countries throughout the world — but especially the Piedmont-Atlantic megaregion (PAM) in the Southeast.

"The core that really grounds the Southeast is the four cities of Charlotte, Atlanta, Birmingham and Raleigh-Durham," Ross said. "It's a bundling of economic life, commerce, mobility, transportation, finance, telecommunications and other infrastructure. It's about linking this region to the global economy. It helps us have a strategy to reflect the way the world has changed."

Our world has been becoming more urban for centuries as people have moved from rural, agricultural economies to service-oriented cities.

Doug Allen, acting dean of Georgia Tech's College of Architecture, put it this way.

"Rome, in about 300 A.D., reached a population of about 1 million," Allen said. "As far as we know, there was no other city in the world with 1 million people until London in 1806."

Today, in China alone, there are 92 cities with more than 1 million people, Allen said. A similar explosion of cities and metro regions is happening around the world. And as those metro areas have grown, they've formed the even larger economic engines — the megaregions.

In the United States, 10 megaregions have been identified — such as the Northeast megaregion (New York and

Boston) or the Midwest (Chicago-Detroit).

A research paper published in the Transportation Research Record last year says that “megaregions are geographic areas that will contain two-thirds of the nation’s population by 2050.”

Ross says development of megaregions will require new investments in infrastructure — particularly in transportation and commerce.

“We need to increase our capacity to move people and freight in a sustainable way,” Ross said. “We need strategies that recognize climate change. And we need more alternatives. High-speed rail and commuter rail have got to be on the table. The rest of the world — like China, Europe and South America —is not wrong.”

Back in 2001, more than a dozen chambers of commerce in the Southeast formed an alliance to push the development of high-speed rail between the major cities. The Southeastern Economic Alliance was housed at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and provided an unusual level of cooperation among cities that often compete against each other when trying to attract companies.

In the past couple of years, that effort has been dormant as the federal government has been reluctant to make a major investment in high-speed rail.

But that could change after the November elections.

At a speech two weeks ago at the U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting in Miami, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, spoke of the need to invest in “clusters of growth and innovation” and rebuild the “crumbling” infrastructure of our roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, as well as our electrical grids.

So far, the presumptive Republican nominee, Sen. John McCain of Arizona, has not released his urban agenda, but he has been more sensitive to environmentally sustainable growth than the current administration.

Such concepts would be welcomed by many who work on the tough policy issues in metro areas. Figuring out how to deal with transportation, water, air quality and other issues is difficult enough when there are multiple cities and counties in the mix. The issues become more complex when the role of the state is included.

And megaregions will require cooperation among many states (six in the Southeast) to tackle those issues on such a large scale. It’s essential that the federal government play a role in helping states work together on regional issues.

“We are going to have to figure out how we can coordinate so we can remain globally competitive,” said Chick Krautler, director of the Atlanta Regional Commission. “Atlanta is going to be a big player in how to build linkages with Raleigh, Charlotte and Birmingham, as well as with Savannah and the coast. In the future, our planning is going to look outward. It’s a huge challenge.”

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By the tooth will set you free

July 6, 2008 1:34 PM | [Link to this](#)

great!!! it is refreshing to see more fancy writ'n about regional planning. this article has inspired me to contemplate our own regional successes. i will have plenty of time on the bus ride to birmingham or stuck in gwinnett or cobb's to ponder the profound accomplishments of our own visionary region. i am confident that very soon, possibly even in 2009, atlanta's and georgia's leadership will proudly usher us into the 19th century.

By newkid

July 6, 2008 5:54 PM | [Link to this](#)

Finally! Thanks Maria.

By Tom West

July 7, 2008 5:24 AM | [Link to this](#)

Hopefully more cities will wake to the idea of mixed-used developments, where people live close to their offices and weekly shopping. Less demand, rather than more supply, is the way forward.

By Dennis

July 7, 2008 9:26 AM | [Link to this](#)

Rather than begin this bundling process by building a very expensive high-speed rail system. Maybe begin with sharing water resources. From each area of the region according to its ability, to each area according to its need.

Next we could merge air transportation by creating The PAM Mega-region Airport Authority. The PAM-MAA would control and operate Birmingham, Atlanta, Chattanooga, Greenville, Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham airports.

After these successes High Speed Rail would be automatic.

By Daedalus

July 7, 2008 9:59 AM | [Link to this](#)

High speed rail will be automatic?

Talk about delusional. Georgia cannot even build a commuter rail system using existing technology because our state leadership lack the will to lead.

And that's with the feds paying 80% of the multi-modal station costs. You will never see an 80-20 federal/state ratio for mass transit funding again. Today the rate is 50/50 — if we qualify — which Georgia won't because it hasn't got a plan that it is willing to pay for.

Let's face it — metro Atlanta will never be able to compete with the NYC/Boston/Philly corridor, or the D.C. Area or the Chicago area — where they actually invest local funds for transit alternatives and believe in regional cooperation.

We'll be lucky to stay up with Houston — which is now ahead of us and moving faster. Maybe we should just set our sights on staying up with Charlotte — although they've already caught up with Atlanta on transit alternatives and are making more headway.

Well, at least we can still say we're ahead of Birmingham — thanks to Mayor Hartsfield — the last Atlanta mayor with a vision for the future.

By jr

July 7, 2008 10:00 AM | [Link to this](#)

nice article

By Road Scholar

July 7, 2008 10:55 AM | [Link to this](#)

The states, counties, and cities need to communicate and plan. They must reach a consensus on issues such as water, transportation, clean air and renewable infrastructure. The biggest issue right now is clean air, in the long term. There must be a shared vision for all governments to implement. to do this there must be a plan with guidelines for sustainable growth.

Here is a web link to a good article on sustainable communities.

http://online.wsj.com/article_email/SB121538754733231043-IMyQjAxMDI4MTA1NjMwODY3Wj.html

By popeye

July 7, 2008 4:11 PM | [Link to this](#)

Just imagine what transportation could be like NOW for moving people in and out of Atlanta, between Chattanooga, Birmingham, Macon, Savannah, Augusta, Athens, and Greenville if our elected officials had put rail commuter systems in place right after the '96 Olympics in Atlanta. Sadly, most elected officials of Georgia do not display the vision and fortitude to make bold decisions come true. Once again, the state of Georgia lags behind, behind, and behind. Why cannot the state of Georgia lead in urban development and have the rest of the world look at us as a way to solve people problems? Commuter rail systems need to be opening across the region every year, right now, but all you hear from the elected officials are more roads and asphalt. Somebody better have the guts to cut "the ties that bind" and get trains on tracks fast.

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