

Time to talk mobility in Gwinnett

By Jill C. Edwards

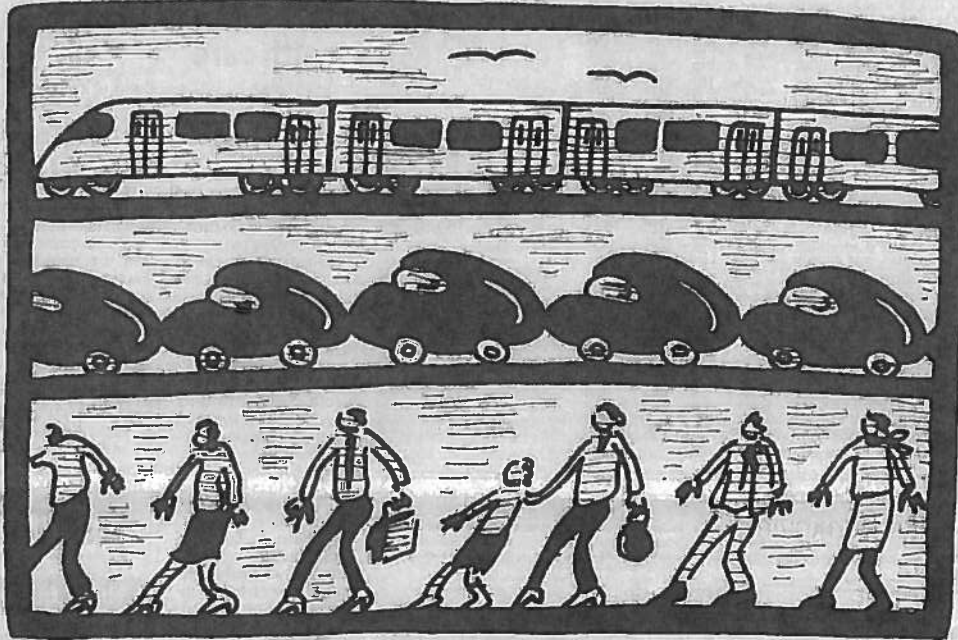
Transportation is the lifeblood of Gwinnett County's economy. It touches every aspect of our daily lives. Over the decades, Gwinnett County has invested millions of dollars into creating a road network that links businesses to their customers and suppliers and homes to schools, jobs, retail centers and recreational venues. Each improvement to the transportation system has resulted in enhancing the economic growth, opportunity and prosperity of the greater community.

But we can no longer rest on past successes. Future trends are clear. Across the nation and in the metro Atlanta region, people are raising their voices seeking greater mobility options going forward.

Time spent in traffic on I-85, SR 316, Highway 78 or any of our other congested roadways is time taken from our families, our friends, and our business and civic interests. For a business, congestion raises costs and cuts into the bottom line. Economists have found that better transportation systems mean an increase in economic output, income generation and growth. As an employer, I am hearing calls for changing the ways we travel and creating a transportation network for the 21st century.

People are wanting to decrease their auto usage, while increasing opportunities for biking, walking and transit.

I believe our transportation infrastructure needs to change to keep up with the demands of residents and employers. We need to plan for a system that will meet the needs of an ever-changing and growing population that Gwinnett is sure to experience over the coming years. We must have a transportation system not based on the past, but we



MARGARET SCOTT / NEWSART

must begin deciding what our network will become for the next 25 years and beyond. We need to plan on a transportation network that offers greater mobility choices than the one we have today.

Creating jobs and keeping our economy strong will require us, as a community, to determine where we want to go and how we want to get there. Failing to plan for our transportation future will result in the loss of Gwinnett's

competitive economic advantage and our superior quality of life. Gwinnett is a community that has always been on the move, reaching for the future, not afraid to embrace change and new ideas.

Now is the time to begin having a conversation about enhancing our economic productivity, connectivity and quality of life. I hope that you will join me in being a part of The Great Exchange (#theGrExchange), a grassroots effort that will bring

thousands of people together to discuss transportation over the course of this week. This is a first-of-its kind initiative to engage with people from all over Gwinnett County to share their views on the future of their community and the role transportation plays in shaping that future.

Simply text "Join" to 74029, and let's begin the journey to creating the next generation of roads, bridges, sidewalks and public transportation systems.



Jill C. Edwards is manager of Wells Fargo's Gwinnett Business Banking team.

GUEST COLUMN

Diversity must drive change in infrastructure

By Jeong-Hwa Lee Towery

The days of a monochromatic suburb have come and gone, particularly in Gwinnett County. Atlanta's largest suburban neighbor boasts the most diverse populace of any county in the entire Southeast U.S. What a phenomenal asset that is for a community striving to have a global reach. Cultural experiences that can be found nowhere else can be found right here in Gwinnett. People from all over the globe have chosen to call this county their home. This in turn, if harnessed, can offer unique levels of access to international markets and foreign capital.

As is often the case, policy decisions and public investment strategies lag behind private trends, but will be forced to catch up if Gwinnett is to truly capitalize on its unique position.

A recent study done by the Georgia Tech School of City and Regional Planning highlighted how much Gwinnett has truly changed. Most everyone knows that Gwinnett is now a majority-minority coun-



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ty. This study dug a little deeper beyond simple census data and evaluated the integration of the immigrant community by conducting interviews and focus groups with foreign-born citizens and business owners.

One of the interesting take-aways from the report, in terms of economic development, was the contrast between the immigrant population's priorities and the infrastructure investments currently being made in Gwinnett.

On the question "How important is improved infrastruc-

ture to the future success of your business?" 17 percent of the non-immigrant respondents said it was very important and 50 percent said it was important, whereas 62 percent of the immigrant respondents said it was very important and 11 percent said it was important.

Also, transit was repeatedly mentioned as a top priority, a common theme in discussions around the county.

It would be easy for someone to say "Well, get out and vote if you want to change the process," but that is often easier said than done for many in these immigrant communities. For some, it may be that they come from countries where individual participation in the civic process is not as valued or effectual and therefore is not ingrained as a right or responsibility. For those whose first language is not English, it is also difficult to find and digest information on policy decisions that may have an impact on their community.

These are not just excuses; they are real barriers that impede full participation of for-

eign-born citizens in the civic process. If left unaddressed, these challenges make it difficult, if not impossible, for their voice to have the same weight as segments of the population that were born and raised in the U.S.

If the goal is to have policy informed by all of Gwinnett's citizens, we have to do a better job of engaging citizens whose voices are not always heard. This should not be an expectation of the county government alone. We all bear a responsibility in working to create a more seamless community where we understand that our needs may not be the same as someone else's, but understand that public investment has to serve all that call Gwinnett home. We must engage in dialogues across the different communities and learn to view issues and problems from different angles than we are used to.

For a county as geographically vast as Gwinnett, strategic investments also have to differ from one end of the county to the other. The infrastructure investments that

make sense for urbanized areas like Norcross, Peachtree Corners and Duluth should differ greatly from the strategies utilized in areas like Dacula and Grayson. If the county is going to thrive in decades to come, the transportation network will need to diversify along with its population.

As the face of Gwinnett has changed and various parts of the county are developing in unique ways, so must the approach to infrastructure investment. A community that has changed so much over the past couple of decades has to also evolve alongside its members when it comes to its public investment strategy and cannot rely on the same solutions that were used in decades past.

For that reason, I am supporting "The Great Exchange," a grassroots effort in Gwinnett bringing people together to discuss one of the most pressing issues facing our community today, transportation, so that we will have a chance to let our community speak for itself.