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Georgia needs a 'Marshall Plan' to deal with transportation crisis

This year marks the 60th anniversary of a speech at Harvard University by Secretary of State George C. Marshall that outlined what would become known as the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan is an important lesson for Georgians today as we search for solutions to our state's outmoded transportation infrastructure.



VIEWPOINT
Jim Maran

Let's review what this means. In 1947, Europe, still devastated by World War II, had just survived one of the worst winters on record. The nations of Europe had nothing to sell for hard currency, and the governments in most countries were unwilling to adopt the draconian proposals for recovery advocated by old-line classical economists. Something had to be done. The United States offered up to \$20 billion for relief, but only if the European nations could get together and draw up a rational plan on how they would use the aid. For the first time, they would have to act as a single economic unit; they would have to cooperate with each



Slow lane: Since 1991, road usage is up more than 40 percent, but road capacity has increased less than 2 percent — and we have done nothing of significance.

other. Ultimately, the Marshall Plan got Europe back on its feet and changed our world forever. Today, we face a transportation crisis in Georgia. We aren't recovering from a war, but our transportation infrastructure, and its lack of funding and action steps to improve it, is getting to a point that may soon be irreversible. Everybody knows it, but nothing substantial has been done to address it. Since 1991, road usage is up more than 40 percent, but road capacity has increased less than 2 percent — and we have done nothing of significance.

Georgia has the fourth-lowest infrastructure investment in the country — and we have done nothing of significance. Eighty-five percent of voters say traffic has "gotten worse" — and we have done nothing of significance. Georgia's transportation improvement plan has been cut by 510 projects and \$7.7 billion and the Atlanta Regional Commission has cut \$5.5 billion from the region's long-term plan — and we have done nothing of significance. It's time we do something — and something BIG. We need a Marshall Plan for Transportation for the state of Georgia. A massive, sweeping overhaul of how we develop our long-term transportation infrastructure and a definitive way to fund it — all of it. No more Band-Aids and temporary, short-term fixes. No

Where is our George C. Marshall? Where is this leader going to come from? Perhaps they'll come from the public sector. With the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce attending every one of the state's joint study committee meetings on transportation funding led by co-chairs Sen. Jeff Mullis and Rep. Vance Smith and our own Rep. Donna Sheldon, we have seen our state elected officials take this crisis seriously. They are to be commended and encouraged to seek the best solutions that make the most impact in the shortest time.

Perhaps they'll come from the private sector. The Gwinnett Chamber has joined the Get Georgia Moving Coalition, stakeholders in the transportation industry and advocates for improved transportation, who recognize current inadequacies in both transportation infrastructure and financing. The timing and formation of these two groups could be the beginnings of a "perfect storm" that will finally create the drastic and lasting change so many of us have been seeking for years. And now, back to our history lesson. The Marshall Plan benefited the American economy as well as Europe since the money was used to buy goods from the United States. And it worked. By 1953 the United States had pumped in \$13 billion, and Europe was standing on its feet again. The same ending will be true for Georgia. With the billions of new dollars we put toward new transporta-

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