



# 2012 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

## 2012 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

**1. Regional Transportation Planning and Governance:** There has been increased emphasis on developing models of comprehensive regional transportation planning, and both state agencies and grassroots organizations have recommended such efforts. At the agency level, the recent report of the Governor’s Development Council on Coordination of Rural Human Services Transportation (RHST) recommends a state office to oversee regional coordination of rural and human services transportation, including funding, a unified reporting manual, a uniform cost-allocation/sharing model, and a one-point telephone number. On the grassroots side, the Coalition of Advocates for Georgia’s Elderly (CO-AGE) has as its top legislative priority the creation of regional transit governance entities on a statewide basis.

Additionally, legislative attention has been focused on the concept of regional transportation coordination through the introduction of SB 283 in the 2011 General Assembly, creating a statewide public transit agency, one of the purposes of which is to coordinate regional transit entities, as well as through the work of both the Transit Governance Study Commission and the Governor’s Transit Governance Task Force. Regional Commissions (RCs) continue to work directly with city/county governments and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) on a variety of services including transportation/transit planning. Further, the preparation for referenda pursuant to the Transportation Investment Act of 2010 (TIA) has laid the groundwork for regional transportation planning, and there are significant opportunities to improve the coordination of transit and human services transportation planning and operations.

• *GTA requests the Georgia General Assembly pass legislation establishing and funding a comprehensive regionalized transportation planning process, including the coordination of human services transportation, and providing for regional governance for transit services outside the Atlanta metro area.*

**2. Tax Exemption from Motor Fuel Purchases by Transit Systems:** Local transit systems must seek legislation to renew their exemption from paying motor fuel taxes (MFT) every two years. The current exemption will expire on June 30, 2012. However, other governmental entities in Georgia (e.g. counties, municipalities and the university system) enjoy a permanent exemption from sales taxes and the MFT. This inequity should be addressed.

• *GTA requests that the General Assembly enact legislation establishing the permanent exemption from taxes paid on motor fuel purchases by transit systems.*

**3. Allow One or More Counties to Vote for a Dedicated Transit Sales Tax:** Current state transportation sales tax law does not provide all local governments the flexibility to create or operate transit systems outside their region. These efforts might include multi-county transit projects such as express bus systems and commuter rail. Since the enactment of the TIA, five counties in the Atlanta metro area are allowed to vote a dedicated sales tax for transit. Outside of Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett, Cobb, and Clayton Counties, other Georgia jurisdictions cannot vote to dedicate sales tax revenues to local or regional transit capital and operating expenses.

• *GTA urges the General Assembly to enact legislation authorizing one or more counties to vote for a dedicated transit sales tax.*



**4. Transit Operating Assistance:** The number of Georgia transit systems and their ridership have grown in recent years, and transit operations are becoming more regional and multi-regional. Further, in both rural and urban areas Georgia transit systems provide rides to clients of the state’s human services transportation programs, and due to federal requirements, in most instances these riders pay far less than the actual cost of the ride to the transit system. Although the TIA allows regional referendum funds to be used by transit systems for operational purposes (with the exception of some restrictions on MARTA), Georgia regrettably remains one of nine states – and the only one of the ten most populous – that does not allocate state funds to assist public transit to maintain a state of good repair. Both urban and rural Georgia transit systems would benefit greatly from authorization of such state appropriations.

• *GTA strongly recommends that the General Assembly create and appropriate monies to a permanent operating assistance funding source for Georgia’s rural and urban transit systems.*

## 2012 FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

**1. Surface Transportation Funding Legislation- Increased Funding and Flexibility:** SAFETEA-LU remains in effect only due to a series of temporary Congressional extensions, and Congress is faced with the challenge of developing a budget which responds to the need to reduce federal debt. As a result, potential scenarios for reauthorization of a surface transportation funding bill have varied from a 30% reduction in transit expenditures to a transportation bill which maintains existing levels but with insufficient trust funds to meet such levels. New authorizing legislation should both focus on a need to enhance economic development and recovery by linking transit, land use and housing, and fully address both the capital and operating needs of transit. There is also a critical need to respond to the fact that many smaller urban transit systems, including Augusta, Columbus, and Savannah, have transitioned into a category serving populations of 200,000 or more, and now no longer qualify to use federal funds for operations.

• *GTA urges the Georgia Congressional Delegation to support a transportation reauthorization bill that will comprehensively address the capital needs for transit systems across Georgia, provide flexibility to use funds for operational purposes, and promote economic development and recovery.*

**2. Federal Appropriations for Transit:** Georgia tends to appropriate state funds for transit only in amount to meet federal matching requirements. Therefore, beyond the overall transportation authorization bill, it is important that transit advocates in Georgia continue to seek annual federal appropriations for capital and operating purposes.

• *GTA requests that the Georgia Congressional Delegation work for full funding of transit formula programs and special one-time appropriations for urban and rural Georgia transit providers.*

**3. Allow Motor Fuel Purchases with Federal Capital Funds:** As is the case for all Americans, both urban and rural transit systems are paying some of the highest fuel prices ever, and they continue to face other funding challenges. Further flexibility in use of federal transit capital funds would assist all transit systems in meeting these challenges.

• *GTA urges the Georgia Congressional Delegation to support necessary changes, whether regulatory or legislative, to allow transit systems to use federal capital funds to purchase motor fuel.*

