

Podcasts

Metro Atlanta's Infrastructure Transcript

June 2008

Moderator: *Welcome to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's EconSouth Now podcast. Today we're talking with Charles "Chick" Krautler, director of the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). Chick oversees and directs regional planning programs in the areas of transportation, air quality, the environment, land use, and water supply, among other programs. The ARC is the official metropolitan planning organization for the 10-county Atlanta region.*

The current issue of the Atlanta Fed's EconSouth magazine focuses on infrastructure in the Southeast, the United States, and around the world. Atlanta, as one of the Southeast's largest cities, is facing the same kind of infrastructure issues as many other areas. Today, we're going to talk about some of the infrastructure-related programs the Atlanta Regional Commission is involved with.

Thanks for joining us today, Chick.



Chick Krautler: Thanks for inviting me.

Moderator: *Fifty Forward is the Atlanta Regional Commission's visioning and planning effort for metro Atlanta. How do infrastructure issues impact this initiative?*

Krautler: Well, infrastructure's critical to the long-range viability of our region. If we're going to continue to grow the way we've have in the past, we got to assure that water supply, water quality, and transportation systems are in place that can meet the demands of a quickly growing population.

Moderator: *Roads and highways are a big part of the infrastructure issue and a big part of your ARC focus. Tell us a little bit about how intelligent transportation systems and the congestion management process will help to take some stress off the road system.*

Krautler: Intelligent transportation systems are kind of the low-hanging fruit of transportation improvements. They are things like the road signs that we have out on the highways, the cameras that allow the HERO [Highway Emergency Response Operators] units to get to an accident quickly, the ramp meters that you're beginning to see on the interstates; they really are traffic operations kinds of things that make our system more efficient.

The congestion management process, on the other hand, is a planning program that we're required to do where we assess the most congested corridors, the most congested roadways in the region, and prioritize those for future investments so that we can fund those projects that really have the best impact on improving transportation in the region.

Moderator: *The Atlanta area has a transit system, and yet untold thousands of commuters opt to drive their own cars through the city every day. Is the ARC working with regional transit providers to help expand their respective footprints as well as proposing additional commuter plans to cut down on the sheer numbers of cars on the roads?*

Krautler: We are. We've been working very closely with a group that includes representatives of the state, all of our local governments, and MARTA and other transit providers to develop a comprehensive plan for transit for the region and then develop a system through which we can deliver that transit. As you probably know, MARTA only operates in two counties, and we have some limited bus service in the other counties, but to really have a comprehensive system we've got to have a new management system for transit.

Moderator: *Are rapidly rising gasoline prices providing an impetus for more commuters to look to transit and rideshare options?*

Krautler: Absolutely. The statistics tell us that since the beginning of this year, the rapidly increasing cost of gasoline has resulted really in a couple of changes. One, MARTA ridership is up about 7 percent, driving is down about 6 percent, and we've had literally thousands and thousands of people contact either the ARC or the Clean Air Campaign about joining either carpools or vanpools. So it is money that ultimately dictates whether or not people will get out of their car.

Moderator: *In a recent ARC newsletter you noted that 2007 was the year of water, and water resources and conservation are part of the region's infrastructure concerns. Tell us how the ARC is implementing the Metropolitan River Protection Act and facilitating the Clean Water Campaign.*

Krautler: Well, water is probably the most significant challenge that we face in metro Atlanta: having enough of it, cleaning it properly, and sending it down to our neighbors to share. The Metropolitan River Protection Act is probably the oldest act in the country. It was passed by legislature in the early '70s, and it's aimed specifically at protecting the water quality in the Chattahoochee [River]. Any development that takes place within a 2,000-foot band on either side of the river has to be approved by us before it can be built. That includes even things like private swimming pools in people's backyards. So it's been really valuable to making sure that that river wasn't just stripped of all vegetation and built up right up to the edge.

The Clean Water Campaign is a public education campaign that really is aimed at making sure that people understand what they can do to both protect water quality and also to conserve water around their house.

Moderator: *How will the city of Atlanta's "Connect Atlanta" program ease the stress on transportation infrastructure?*

Krautler: Well, the "Connect Atlanta" program is really, I think, going to be a model for the rest of the local governments in our region. It's a truly comprehensive planning approach to developing new alternatives for transportation in the city. It's going to provide people with a lot of options besides using their car, but I think the best part about it is that it's very citizen-oriented. It's really driven by an awful lot of public outreach, so that when they complete the program it'll be a plan that has the support of a broad base of citizens for implementation.

Moderator: *Thanks so much for your insights, Chick. Again, we've been speaking with Chick Krautler of the Atlanta Regional Commission. This concludes our EconSouth Now podcast on infrastructure issues. For more information, please see the second quarter 2008 issue of EconSouth magazine. From our Web site, you can read all the stories in the magazine or subscribe. Thanks for listening, and please return for more podcasts. If you have comments, please send us an e-mail to podcast@frbatlanta.org.*

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