Opportunity deferred:
Race, transportation, and the future of Metropolitan Atlanta

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Opportunity deferred

1. Overview

2. History

3. Recommendations
1. Overview
The argument

• Transportation infrastructure and land use decisions affect the geography of opportunity

• Prior decisions about transportation, land use, and growth in the Atlanta metropolitan region have been affected by racism

• The entire region is worse off when decisions are racialized, but people of color suffer the most
The goal and approach

• Create a document that outlines the racialized nature of historical planning and policymaking

• Describe how those past efforts continue to shape current thinking about planning and what’s possible in the region

• Provide concrete examples of promising practices and recommendations for moving forward

• Use the document to advocate for equitable plans and infrastructure investments
2. History
Federal policies

Housing

• Depression-era lending favored white, suburban, racially homogenous areas

• Later lending disproportionately benefitted whites
  • Less than 2% of $120 billion in loans made by the FHA (1934-1962) went to people of color

• Redlining created a downward spiral in communities locked out of funding

1935 Home Owners’ Loan Corporation map of greater Atlanta
Federal policies

Housing

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- GI Bill loans disproportionately benefited whites
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Federal policies

Transportation

• “White flight” required new transportation infrastructure

• 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act designated a 41,000 mi. system of interstate freeways
  - $25 billion, 90% fed. match over 13 years

• Planning undertaken by state officials in collaboration with locals but with little public input
The interstate system's urban expressways ripped through residential neighborhoods and leveled wide swaths of urban territory…It now seems apparent that public officials and policy makers used expressway construction to **destroy low-income and especially black neighborhoods in an effort to reshape the physical and racial landscapes of the postwar American city.**

--Historian Ray Mohl
Atlanta plans consistent with federal policies

The 1946 “Lochner Report” detailed an ambitious freeway plan

- *Lochner Report* (1946) sought to separate downtown from surrounding neighborhoods
  - Downtown Connector used to remove Blacks from areas near downtown

- *Up Ahead* (1952) plan proposed “slum clearance” using urban renewal funds
  - Sweet Auburn and surrounding neighborhoods characterized as a “definite menace to the health of the downtown area.”
• Downtown connector was completed in the early 1960s, splitting Auburn Ave. in two

• Combination of interstate construction and urban renewal likely displaced ~70,000 people, about 95% of whom were Black

A page from the Lochner Report illustrates areas to be displaced by freeways
MARTA 1960s-1970s

- 1964 Urban Mass Transportation Act made federal funding available for transit capital expenditures

- Rail viewed as necessary to project the image of a cosmopolitan, world city and to retain interest in downtown
  - Similar to other rail systems proposed at the time (BART, DC Metro)

- MARTA created in 1965, initial funding measure failed in 1968 with little support from the Black community
MARTA 1960s-1970s

• Sales tax passed in 1971, only in Fulton and DeKalb counties

• Other counties rejected due to racial fears and limited service

• Expansion of regional transit outside of the core counties has stalled over time due to racial fears
Automobile ownership differential

source: 5-Year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample
Commute time differential
Transportation cost burdens
3. Recommendations
Recommendations

_Governance reforms_

• Improve representation on regional boards
  • Currently structured based on “one government, one vote”

• Create a regional transit governance board
  • Integrate decision making
  • Emphasize regional benefits

• Senate Study Committee on Regional Transit Solutions recommends further study and statewide funding for transit (Dec. 2016)
Recommendations

Finance

• New sources of revenue needed to support existing levels of service, fund expansion, and grow ridership

• New MARTA half-cent in City of Atlanta is a promising start
  • Questions about project list and prioritization
  • Mitigate displacement with a “Living Transit Fund”

• Engage with negative and racialized perceptions of transit to build strong constituencies for regional funding going forward
Recommendations

Learn from promising practices

• Real transportation equity wins have been achieved across the country
  • Clayton County MARTA expansion
  • Bay Area equity scenario analysis and advocacy
  • King County, Washington equity and social justice initiative
  • “Corridors of Opportunity” in the Twin Cities, Minnesota

• Extract key lessons from these cases and others and seek to apply them locally and regionally
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Regional demographic change

• 1970 to 2000: 10-County ARC Region grows almost 130%

• Gwinnett and Cobb received over half of that growth

• Clayton got 7% of growth, becomes more racially diverse
Regional context

- Historical north-south split
  - Racial segregation, economic opportunity

Jobs, people, and prosperity have moved northwards and outwards, leaving a large arc of little or no population growth, economic decline, and an unusually high concentration of poverty on the south side of the City of Atlanta and its close-in southern suburbs.

Transportation cost burden

• Using individual PUMS records, calculate transportation cost burden

• Assume 260 commuting days in a year and standard per-mile costs (fixed + variable), aggregated at the household level

• Cost-burdened households have greater than mean proportional expenditures on transportation