

Taxi-Transit Integration in the Atlanta Region

Atlanta's Taxi Industry,
Taxi Industry Forum, and
Regional Agency Staff Interviews

September 2000

Prepared Under Contract for
Georgia Regional Transportation Authority

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Overview of the Taxi and Vehicles for Hire Regulatory Structure

There are 82 agencies in the 13-County Atlanta Metropolitan Area with regulatory authority over the operation of taxicabs and vehicles for hire. The City of Atlanta (through the Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire), the Atlanta Hartsfield Airport Authority, each of the 13 counties, and 66 individual cities all have the authority to regulate taxicab operations. The State of Georgia, through the Public Service Commission, requires that limousine drivers obtain a chauffeur's license from the State, but does not exercise direct permitting oversight on taxicab operations. Most cities and counties have adopted zoning ordinance requirements and business license provisions that affect the industry. More than half of these agencies (43) have implemented "Vehicles for Hire" ordinances, many of which provide significant requirements affecting vehicles, drivers, and day-to-day operations of the taxi industry. A comparative review of these specific vehicles for hire provisions is contained in a separate report.

Probably the most important set of regulations affecting the industry is that of the Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire (the Bureau) established in 1982. This small regulatory agency resides within the Atlanta Police Department, employing approximately 20 persons to oversee the operations of taxicabs within the City of Atlanta and the immediate (10-mile buffer) area surrounding Atlanta. As the majority of airport and convention traffic occurs in the CBD and Atlanta convention and hotel venues, a large percentage of regional taxicab trips are under the jurisdiction of the Bureau. Between 52,000 and 56,000 taxi trips are made from the airport each month.

For a taxicab to operate within the jurisdictional boundaries established by the bureau, the vehicle owner must purchase (or lease from an owner) one of 1582 Certificates of Public Necessity and Convenience (or CPNC). CPNC ownership is diverse, with certificates owned by taxicab companies, leasing companies, and private individuals (there is no restriction on ownership). This medallion-style system established an original allocation of 1582 permits in 1979-82. Working taxicabs are currently using approximately 1560 of these permits. The Bureau initially issued these permits at a cost to the industry of \$100.00 per permit. The Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire estimates that these permits change hands today at a sale price of approximately \$12,000.00. However, private parties are not required to report the actual transfer costs. The interviewed cab company owners indicated that these permits are actually changing hands for a price of \$23,000.

The only requirements for a certificate transfer are: proof of insurance, passage of a safety inspection, proof of emissions, and payment of the transfer fee. Taxi industry representatives indicate that the cost of these permits may increase to as much as \$30,000.00 over the next five years. The City has not issued any new permits since the original 1982 allocation. For the Bureau to issue additional permits, the Atlanta City Council would require that a case be made that additional taxicabs are needed to serve Atlanta's passenger demand. CPNC transfer fees are \$100.00 per transfer and annual renewal fees are \$50.00/CPNC/year (however, the fee structure is currently under litigation).

Each vehicle used in the city of Atlanta must be associated with one of 28 currently permitted taxicab companies. For a new company to start operations in Atlanta, they must: purchase or

lease 25 CPNCs, undergo a background check, obtain a business license, establish a permanent business location, demonstrate adequate parking facilities, procure and register vehicles, have the vehicles inspected, and provide adequate proof of insurance. Some of the cab companies own most or all of the vehicles associated with their company operations (e.g. Checker Cab, Rapid Taxi, Royal Taxi, and University Taxi). Other companies serve as cooperatives. Each driver in a cooperative owns their own vehicle but collectively pools dispatch resources (such as Star, National, and Crown).

Before each vehicle operates on Atlanta streets, the company must meet specific requirements associated with vehicle marking, comfort, and safety criteria. Vehicles typically travel between 80,00 and 100,000 miles each year, so inspections for vehicle safety and emissions certification are very important. The Bureau visits the taxicab companies to conduct annual vehicle inspections, and conducts spot inspections during the day and night throughout Atlanta (mainly at the airport and at taxi stands near hotels and convention venues). Official Bureau inspectors' vehicles are visible on the streets of Atlanta. Four or five staff Bureau staff members operate from the Atlanta airport. Bureau staff and taxicab drivers both indicate that the Bureau is proactive in conducting these inspections. At the time of this study, Bureau ordinances required that taxi vehicle age not exceed 5 years, but this regulation was not being enforced pending litigation. During the course of this study, the City Council adopted a new ordinance stating that the age of all taxicabs must exceed 8 years. Because the taxi fleet is often the first and last transportation experience that convention visitors to Atlanta will have, this new regulation will significantly change the face of the taxi fleet and should help improve customer satisfaction.

Drivers must also obtain a driver permit from the Bureau and associate themselves with one of the licensed companies. Regulations prevent drivers from hopping from company to company. Driver registration fees are \$20.00/driver/year. Drivers must be 18 years of age, have lived in Atlanta for one year, demonstrate command of the English language, undertake 12-15 hours of training, and pass a written exam on taxi operations. The taxi companies and the Bureau conduct driver training. The Bureau enforces driver requirements relating to the operation of taxicabs.

The Mayor and City Council determine the fare structure for taxi operations under the Bureau's jurisdiction. The fare structure is fixed, with specific airport fares, zone fares, and senior/disabled discount fares.

Taxi Industry Forum:

On Friday July 21, 2000, from 1:30 p.m. until 3 p.m., GRTA hosted an open forum with taxi companies and taxi operators at the GRTA headquarters building (245 Peachtree Center Avenue, Suite 900, in downtown Atlanta). The goal of the workshop was to seek the input and ideas from the taxi industry regarding how the region could improve the integration of taxi and transit operations. By design, the industry workshop did not include representatives of the regulatory community so participants would feel free to voice their opinions on relationships between the industry and regulatory community. The meeting served as an opportunity for the companies to bring to the table new ideas to both support transit activity and enhance the taxi industry. Dr. Randall Guensler, a professor at Georgia Tech and principal of Trans/AQ, Inc., hosted the meeting and facilitated meeting discussions.

To identify the potential participants for the forum, Trans/AQ, Inc. identified the 81 regulatory jurisdictions responsible for issuing business licenses or permits to operate taxis in the Atlanta region. The 81 agencies included the Atlanta Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire, the Atlanta Airport Authority, 13 counties, and 66 cities. Each permitting agency was contacted by telephone on July 6, 2000 and asked to submit to GRTA a list of companies that had been issued business licenses or permits at the county or city level. Multiple follow-up calls were required to obtain the information from many of these agencies. The regulatory agencies that responded to the request for information within the first week and a half of July provided the address list used to invite taxi companies to participate in the forum. As local jurisdictions provided addresses and as these addresses entered the company database, GRTA mailed a batch of invitations every few days. The final database contains 258 taxicab companies in the region (see Appendix A). More than 200 of these companies received invitations to participate in the taxi forum. Companies typically received letters requesting their participation between one and two weeks prior to the forum. Many of these companies are individual owner-operators.

The invitation letter requested that companies limit their attendance to one manager and/or one driver per company location. Because the taxi company mailing database was still incomplete, the invitation letter did not reach all potential participants. For example, the City of East Point did not provide the addresses of taxi companies until August 6, 2000. The invitation letter asked each company to forward a copy of the invitation letter to any companies that identified as not having received a letter. The Atlanta taxi industry association (referred to in a recent Atlanta Journal Constitution article) was not approached for assistance in distributing invitations, as this association is composed only of three companies representing approximately 15% of the Atlanta taxicab fleet.

Despite the widespread mailing of invitations, only four individuals attended the taxi forum. Three cab companies were represented (two from the City of Atlanta and one from Marietta). The fourth representative was a consultant to the taxi industry. The meeting lasted approximately three hours and covered a broad range of topics. Despite the low attendance, the meeting was successful in identifying a number of important policy and technical issues facing the taxi industry in the Atlanta Metropolitan region. To supplement the information gained during the taxi forum, the contractor performed follow-up office interviews with two cab company representatives and numerous field interviews with taxi drivers in the field. These supplemental interviews aimed at confirming the findings of the association meeting and identifying additional issues not addressed in the forum. This report does not include the names of the participants to ensure that issues raised remain in confidence.

Types of Taxi Service

There are three general types of taxicab services provided in Atlanta:

- *Demand Response*- Radio dispatch (or cellular telephone contact with owner-operator) is used to link the customer and taxicab. Radio operators dispatch the taxis to waiting customers at the customer's location. Wait times are inherent. Companies typically indicate that the wait will be 10-15 minutes, but actual wait times can be longer.

- *Taxi Queues*- Taxicabs wait in line at an area/site with high passenger demand, such as the airport or convention center. Waiting times can be significant and potentially limit total daily receipts for drivers. For example, the airport Bull Pen holds more than 300 taxicabs and wait times can exceed 3 hours. Radio dispatch companies, such as Checker Cab, do not typically provide airport service from the bullpen because drivers cannot make enough money to pay for the cab lease fees. At three to four airport trips/day, drivers would not break even over a 6-day period! Radio dispatch systems open a larger market for the companies that employ the technology.
- *Streetside Hailing*- During convention season, taxis obtain a significant number of fares in the downtown zone, as passengers hail cabs at curbside. Checker Cab indicates that their vehicles tend to “disappear” from radio dispatch availability during these times because drivers are busy picking up curbside fares. Coordination of taxicab operations during the most heavily trafficked conventions can significantly increase taxi fares. The important aspect of this service is visibility and accessibility, as most trips in the downtown are impulse travel decisions.

Given the nature of the types of taxi service provided, there are two general lifestyles for taxi drivers:

- *Casual Cab Operator*- The casual cab operator leases a low cost cab (about 250.00/week) which is often an older vehicle and prefers to wait in queue for an airport pickup. These drivers have an opportunity to socialize with other drivers while on queue. Long waiting times and amenities such as an air- conditioned waiting room with cafeteria, television, phones, etc. at the airport tend to support this business lifestyle. Because these drivers typically only handle four or five fares a day, incomes associated with casual cab operators operating style are very low.
- *Street Hustler*- Drivers that hustle from location to location, seeking cab fares, can earn significant wages. These drivers lease more expensive radio dispatch cabs or know the areas where regular demand coincides with a limited supply of cabs. These cabbies often build relationships with regular patrons. “To make money in this business you have to hustle.” Drivers can only transport a finite number of fares in one day. Drivers working 10 hours/day and 6 days/week can make upwards of \$40,000/year. The lowest paid Checker Cab driver makes nearly \$35,000/year, even after paying a \$500.00/week vehicle lease.

Given the apparent significant under-utilization of the taxi fleet at the airport, there does not appear to be a need to expand the supply of CPNCs at this time. Over the next two years, a study of taxi utilization should be undertaken to confirm this conclusion. A simple system that reduces the number of taxicabs waiting in the Airport Taxicab bullpen may significantly increase the number of cabs available elsewhere in Atlanta.

It is also important to note that the existing airport system does not reward taxicab companies and drivers that provide quality service. The system is simply first come first serve for the taxi pool. Setting aside an area that is designated for on-demand airport passenger pickup (where the

passenger can select the company that will provide their service) has the potential to significantly improve service and reduce potential for over charges.

General Issues of Concern Raised by Industry

1. Visibility and Convenience:

Taxi trips can be broken into two categories: 1) pre-planned trips, and 2) impulse trips. Many long distance taxi trips by local residents are pre-planned (such as an airport-taxi-home trip, or airport-MARTA-taxi-home trip). Corporations will contract with taxi companies to provide shuttle service from the airport or between corporate facilities. The taxi mode for these trips is predominantly pre-planned. More than 80% of trips at MARTA stations are outbound trips, inferring that local travelers returning home after a round trip by rail used another means to reach the rail station. The taxi mode from the transit station to the home may be pre-planned, based upon the regular presence of taxis at the location. Travelers may also decide whether to call home for a ride or take a taxi based upon whether a cab is present when they arrive at the station.. Business travelers in Downtown Atlanta, be they local residents or conference attendees, often make destination decisions as a function of whether a cab is present. If the desired destination is too far to walk in time allotted, and if a taxi is not present to provide rapid transport, consumers may select an alternative lunch or entertainment location. This means that the taxi industry survives and thrives on visibility and accessibility. If taxis are not visible and convenient to passengers, they will lose a significant mode share. Although signage and direction to obtain a cab can help increase consumer awareness, the direct visibility of the taxis is the most important factor because people make very quick travel decisions. Thus, industry representatives argue that the taxi waiting areas need to be as close to the passengers as possible and visible to travelers as they depart their previous activity.

2. Inappropriate Vehicle Stops to Pick Up Fares:

The Atlanta Police Department can fine drivers \$150.00 for making "inappropriate stops" in a business district to pick up a fare. For example, on Peachtree Road in Downtown Atlanta, police officers will not allow drivers to stop and pick up fares. The biggest complaint received by the Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire is "fare refusal," either based upon race of passenger, appearance of socioeconomic status, or stated trip distance. Unfortunately, when a driver legitimately passes by a fare on a major thoroughfare such as Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta because of the potential \$150.00 fine, the action furthers the perception of fare refusals in the region. Company owners indicated that the enforcement of the "inappropriate stops" provisions is highly variable and may even depend upon the mood of the enforcing officer. Traffic circulation and enforcement of standing/stopping regulations should be coordinated with the taxi industry. In many major cities, taxis may stop in the right hand lane to pick up a fare, provided the fare is specifically flagging the cab to stop. Atlanta should also allow this, except in areas specifically designated and properly signed as a no stopping zone (based upon the results of traffic engineering and safety analyses).

3. Regulatory Structure:

It is important to note that the following findings are based solely upon the participation of the four representatives attending the meeting. These representatives operate vehicles in the

City of Atlanta, Atlanta Airport, and City of Marietta. These three major areas are subject to similar regulations governing taxicab operations. Hence, the issues raised here cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the other 78 regulatory jurisdictions that also have authority to regulate taxi operations.

- Numerous local rules and regulations govern the taxi industry. From a philosophical standpoint, company representatives do not appear to be in favor of a central government agency with the authority to develop stringent regional regulations. At the same time, given the patchwork of local regulations, these same industry representatives acknowledge that a uniform body of rules and regulations could significantly improve the regulatory conditions in the region. Company representatives seem to be of the opinion that a regional authority could benefit the industry, but such an agency could make things worse for taxi operators if implemented improperly.
- Some jurisdictions require submission of proof of insurance before vehicles can operate. Checker Cab is a self-insured business and has been for 28 years. The company meets the Georgia minimum liability requirements. “Nine out of ten times in a lawsuit, lawyers go after the limits on insurance. If you have a \$1 million dollar policy, that’s what they go for.” It is important for small businesses (which all taxicab companies are) to provide insurance coverage within their ability to pay maintaining only the minimum levels is a technique really designed to limit defacto legal liability. A study of insurance issues in the taxi industry should be undertaken to learn how existing requirements affect liability and small business profitability.
- The Bureau of Taxicab and Vehicles for Hire implement regulations requiring driver training and licensing. While industry supports the training and certification process, there is a general problem with scheduling the training of new drivers. It can take as long as 90 days for a driver to receive their permit to operate a taxicab in Atlanta. Industry representatives point out that becoming a taxicab driver is typically not the first job choice that an individual makes. Once the potential drivers find out that it will take 90 days before they can begin driving, they give up and seek other employment. On-demand classroom driver training, structured in-vehicle ride-along training, and temporary permits would both enhance and streamline Atlanta's driver training programs.
- The implementation and enforcement of local regulations is not consistent across jurisdictions. For example, taxicabs that pass inspections in the City of Atlanta often do not pass inspection in the cities of East Point or College Park.

4. **Working Relationships with MARTA**

The general consensus is that the taxi industry does not have many problems with MARTA. Working relationships between taxi companies and drivers and MARTA operations (i.e. MARTA Station Managers.) and the MARTA Police Department are very good.

5. **Cooperative Operations with MARTA**

There are currently no cooperative operations between MARTA and the taxi industry. When asked about MARTA's policy of calling cabs when necessary to ensure that patrons are not stranded at a MARTA station when it closes, drivers and company representatives responded

that they had never received any “station clearing calls.” A formal programs that employs taxicabs to serve bus/rail-stranded passengers would be very popular with the taxi companies.

6. Federal Funding Opportunities

Company representatives indicated that two to three years ago Federal dollars for use by private carriers to support transit operations became available. The taxi industry has heard about these opportunities and approached MARTA, but could not get an audience to even discuss the possibilities. The general feeling in the industry is that the \$1 million dollars that would be made available to MARTA is too small for the agency to worry about, considering their total annual budget. Since the money goes outside the agency, it has not achieved a high priority for discussion/action. Yet, \$1 million is a great deal of money to the taxi industry. Taxi companies are interested in pursuing public/private partnerships. Many cab companies are able to do this in other cities. For example, Phoenix contracted with local cab companies to provide 24 -hour service under shared ride (multiple passenger jitney service) conditions.

7. Taxicab Company Participation in the Planning Process

The taxi industry can only bring issues to the attention of City government through the City Council public participation process. There is no taxicab task force to regularly address issues of importance to the taxi industry. Such a task force would include representatives from the following: taxicab owners (multiple), taxicab drivers (multiple), Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, Georgia Department of Transportation, City of Atlanta Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire, MARTA Police, MARTA Planning, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Atlanta Regional Commission Clean Air Campaign, and the Hartsfield Airport Authority. Currently, only three of these players are currently participating in regulatory negotiations on vehicle fleet age (the Taxicab Bureau, the Convention Bureau, and representatives from three taxi companies).

Specific MARTA Station Issues Raised by Industry

The majority of issues associated with specific rail stations are addressed in a separate report that summarizes the field inspections and interviews conducted at all of the MARTA rail stations. However, the following issues were deemed important enough to the company owners to be raised at the taxi forum.

1. The Five Points station has no locations where taxis can pick up passengers without being in potential violation of traffic ordinance enforcement under "inappropriate stops" provisions.
2. The Lakewood MARTA station is a "real problem." Passengers have to go to the West End or Oakland stations to obtain cab service.
3. The West End station used to provide a cab staging area in the front of the station. MARTA moved the taxi stand to the back of the parking lot area. Since this time, fares have dropped and "we now have a problem with bootleggers," or unmarked passenger cars and pickups providing taxi service. Cab operators indicated at the forum that Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire Inspectors have asserted to them that the Bureau does not have jurisdiction

to stop the operations of bootleg cabs (because these vehicles do not have Certificates of Public Necessity and Convenience). However, this group can enforce regulations requiring vehicles to have obtained a CPNC, as they are a part of the Atlanta Police Force.

4. MARTA police officers and station managers do not always allow cab drivers to use the amenities at stations provided for MARTA patrons (such as bathrooms, benches, and shade). Use decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. Some stations will always allow the use of facilities, and other stations never allow the use of facilities. For the most part, the decision is a function of which station manager and MARTA police officers are on staff at the time of the request.
5. Taxis serve as an informal security system for MARTA stations and parking lots. When cab drivers observe a crime in progress, or suspicious behavior, they notify the MARTA Police by cellular telephone. MARTA Police officers acknowledge that cab drivers provide significant assistance in reporting crimes at the stations. Studies of crime statistics in lots with and without taxi stands would be useful.
6. MARTA Police officers enforce the parking conditions at taxi stands. If more taxis arrive than the stands will accommodate, police response is varied. Some officers will allow taxi drivers to remain on the property if they move their vehicles to a remote section of the parking lot. Other officers will require that the taxis leave the MARTA property. Drivers indicate that regular MARTA patrons sometimes park in taxi stands. MARTA Police are quick to assist the taxi drivers by citing these vehicles and removing them from stands when necessary. It would be helpful of individual station plans specified deployment areas for waiting taxis. If MARTA prepared such plans, taxi waiting would become largely self-enforcing.

Bureau of Taxicab and Vehicles for Hire Interviews

Information on Bureau operations in introduction of the report was obtained through an interview with Joanne Smith, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire (Department of Police Services; City of Atlanta; 818 Washington Street, SW; Atlanta, GA 30315; 404-658-7600). Ms. Smith has 13-years experience in the Bureau. Jesse Flanigan, III; Director of the Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire (Atlanta Police Department; 818 Washington Street, SW; Suite C11A; Atlanta, GA 30315; 404-658-7603) was also interviewed to identify important issues to the Bureau. The basic operations of the Bureau are described in the introduction to this report (and data in that section was supplemented by information provided by driver interviews and the taxi forum). Other than the information reported there, there are two additional significant issues of concern to the Bureau: 1) fare refusal, and 2) overcharging for fares. These two issues constitute the majority of complaints received by the Bureau. The Bureau analyzes their complaint data and summarizes the figures for the Police Chief and the Mayor. However, Director Flanigan indicated that these data were preliminary and could not be made available by the Bureau for use in preparing this report. Fare refusal and overcharging for fares were also important issues to the drivers themselves. Those interviewed indicated that a few drivers create a bad name for the industry through their activities. Additional oversight and

covert enforcement actions to reduce the frequency of fare refusal and overcharging appear warranted.

MARTA Interviews

Ed Bishop, the Customer Service Center Supervisor, and Flossie Marie Whitting-Farid, a MARTA Customer Service Representative (2424 Piedmont Road, NE; Atlanta, GA 30324-3330; 404-848-4800) were interviewed to determine MARTA policies toward taxi station planning.

Barry Hodges, Manager of Architecture for MARTA, provided information on the design of MARTA stations and incorporation of taxi stands into station design. The architecture department makes the initial determination of taxi demand and determines the required number of spaces on a station-by-station basis. No specific guidance is available for staff to estimate this demand. Mr. Hodges indicated that MARTA staff did not plan for taxis on the east-west line during the original design phase. Although MARTA included consideration of taxis in the design of station on the north-south line, Mr. Hodges indicated that MARTA staff significantly underestimated the demand for taxis at the Dunwoody station. MARTA planned for eight taxi stands at Dunwoody, but as many as fifteen stands are needed. In designing the two new facilities on the north-south line (North Springs and Sandy Springs), MARTA will incorporate a larger number of additional taxi stands. It did become clear during the station visits that research studies are necessary to quantify the demand for taxi stand facilities at existing stations. Controlled experiments should also be undertaken to determine whether demand for these facilities increases proportionally when additional facilities are provided (and increased visibility of the taxi fleet results).

Each of the four main MARTA rail lines (north, south, east, and west) is overseen by a MARTA Police Major. Supervising Sergeants and line officers associated with each line make decisions regarding daily operations of taxicabs at local MARTA stations. Drivers reported excellent relationships with MARTA Police. Most of the taxi drivers interviewed throughout the MARTA system knew the name of the MARTA Police major with jurisdiction over the applicable line.

MARTA line commanders coordinate taxi stand operational decisions with Michael Parker, Assistant MARTA Chief. Once MARTA Police make decisions to change taxi stand placement, the MARTA Facilities Maintenance Department changes signage and lane striping.¹

Hartsfield Atlanta Airport Authority Interview

Winston W. Cooper, Manager of Aviation Ground Transportation at Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport (Department of Aviation; Atrium Suite 435; Atlanta, GA 30320; 404-530-6674) provided information on issues of industry significance associated with airport operations. Between 52,000 and 58,000 taxi trips are made from the Airport every month.

¹ Phil Carroll, MARTA Vice President of Facilities Maintenance (404-848-5260)

Until the arrival of the current director, the Airport Authority collected little information on taxicab activity. The Authority is currently in the process of installing electronic monitoring systems to track taxi dispatch operations. The Authority is also considering the addition of a dedicated taxi lane from the bullpen to the concourse to improve traffic circulation. The Director of Ground Transportation is currently drafting a Standard Operating Procedures document for all ground transportation operations. The taxicab industry should be involved in reviewing and providing input on this document. The Airport Authority recently conducted surveys of airport customers in the terminals, asking these individuals for information on their county of origin. Additional studies related to access mode should be conducted as well.

The Airport Authority contracts with a third party to manage taxicab dispatch operations from the bullpen. These curbside operators (known as taxi starters) manage daily fleet operations. If taxi starters note an operational or enforcement problem, they will call for a Bureau inspector to address the issue. When additional taxis are needed at curbside, the taxi starters ring the bell in the bullpen, dispatching taxis in groups of 10. Because there is limited control over the egress of these vehicles, 10 to 20 actually leave the bullpen with every call. The taxi drivers indicate that if they do not do so, patrons will have to wait for cabs to arrive during peak periods. The Airport Authority could employ surveillance cameras and advanced monitoring and control technologies (if resources are made available) to significantly enhance dispatch operations and airport logistics.

Taxicabs that have received a CPNC from the Bureau of Taxicabs and Vehicles for Hire may operate at the airport facility. Cabs that do not service the city of Atlanta, and do not have a CPNC, may serve the airport provided they obtain a \$25.00/year permit from the Airport Authority. Upon arrival at the bullpen, taxicab operators pay 50 cents upon arrival at the bullpen area (token machine and toll gate). Taxicabs that are willing to accept credit cards (credit card companies impose a 4% to 8% commission, reducing driver income), are allowed to queue in a separate line and are dispatched more frequently than other cabs. These cabs arrive at a specially-designated pick up area that also indicates that the cab company is willing to accept credit cards.

Taxi trips originating at the Airport are subject to the Atlanta fare structure. Cabs servicing Atlanta and Buckhead must adhere to the zone and mileage rate structure established by the Atlanta City Council. Cabs servicing other areas in the region must employ the standard metered rate of \$1.60/mile.

The Bureau regularly conducts inspections of vehicles in the airport bullpen and enforces Bureau regulations that apply to CPNC vehicles. The Airport Authority relies entirely upon the Bureau for enforcement of taxicab regulations and does not employ their own inspectors or enforcement officers.

GDOT Interview

Steve Kish, GDOT Planning and Programs Division,² indicated that there really is no role for taxis in the current transportation planning process. The primary factor affecting the participation of taxis is the fact that the mode does not fall into a category for receiving federal aids. The taxicab companies are not included on the mailing list for rural public hearings and the state agency does not target their participation in the planning process. GDOT also does not play a role in the travel demand management program (the guaranteed ride home program) implemented by the Atlanta Regional Commission.

ARC Interviews

Tracy Eller of the Atlanta Regional Commission was contacted to determine the extent to which the taxi industry is invited to participate in the regional transportation planning process. Ms. Eller, after contacting other members of ARC staff, confirmed that neither the taxi industry as a whole, nor specific taxi companies, is currently incorporated into an advisory or planning participation process. Given the importance of the industry to service of the airport, convention travel, MARTA stations, and service in travel demand management strategies, representatives of the taxi industry probably should be invited to participate in planning activities. Although ARC staff do not directly incorporate the taxi industry into the transportation planning process, staff do acknowledge the importance of the taxi industry through the implementation of the regional guaranteed ride home program. This program is working well in Atlanta, as discussed in the following section. The program could readily be expanded through increased taxi company participation (which, given the fragmented nature of the taxi industry, will require a significant and sustained outreach effort on the part of ARC staff) and other public outreach efforts.

The Atlanta Guaranteed Ride Home Program

The Atlanta Regional Commission's Commute Connection Program manages Atlanta's guaranteed ride home program. This program allows users of alternative transportation modes (carpool, vanpool, transit, walking, or bicycling) to obtain a taxicab or rental car in the case of a transportation emergency. Qualifying conditions to obtain a guaranteed ride home include: illness during work hours, emergency involving a family member, a serious problem at school or daycare, home burglary or other emergency, premature departure of carpool driver, or an unforeseen requirement to work overtime. The goal of the program is to provide a safety net for employers that use alternative modes, thereby increasing the likelihood that commuters will be willing to take alternative modes.

Bill Minter directs the program for the ARC.³ The ARC receives federal funds to run the program. Business, industry, government, and non-profit agencies are eligible to participate in the program. Employers must provide a dedicated employee to manage the program on the

² (404) 651-9210

³ Commute Connection, ARC, 40 Courtland Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30303, 404-463-3290.

employer side. Employees register with the ARC (through the employer's management representative) to participate in the program. When the employee needs to leave early (or late) they contact their employer representative in advance to obtain an Emergency Ride Voucher. The supervisor and taxi driver both sign off on the voucher and the Commute Connection program pays the taxi (or rental car) company directly.

Participation in the ARC Commute Connection guaranteed ride home program was difficult for some companies to implement. ARC staff also indicated that they have received a varied response from the taxi industry for the program. Company bookkeeping and billing setups do not correspond to those used by the sponsoring agency. Companies need an account number for billing and passenger name/proof of authorization before they can chance accepting a fare that may not be paid by the agency. Drivers indicate that the ride home program needs more consumer education to keep people from becoming discouraged from using the service. The ARC has also dropped some taxicab companies from the program.

ARC staff have identified the service areas for the participating taxi companies. Some of the participating businesses are not located within the service areas of participating taxi companies. Currently, only seven taxi companies are participating in the program. Given the large number of taxi companies serving the Atlanta area, the solution to the lack of a local taxi service is to bring additional cab companies into the program.

ARC staff has prepared a general information package for distribution to potential participants. The package neatly communicates the rules and regulations that govern participation in the program. More than 166 companies and 6955 employees are currently participating in the program. On average, Atlanta's employees only use the guaranteed ride home program for 35 trips per month (at an average cost of \$42.00/trip). Data are not available to indicate the modes taken to work by employees that used the taxi or rental car to return home. The net cost of this program is very low for the regional benefits that it provides in encouraging the formation of carpools and use of alternative modes. Because each employee is limited to a maximum of five trips per year, there is little potential for abuse of the program.

Surprisingly, the 2000 Clean Air Campaign, which is currently undertaking a major television advertising effort in the region (budget in excess of \$1 million for direct advertising), did not highlight the guaranteed ride home program as a core advertisement.

Conclusions

The taxi industry in the Atlanta region is quite large. Multiple jurisdictions regulate the taxi industry in the region. The number of taxis allowed to operate in the City of Atlanta is limited to 1582 vehicles. Although there is definitely a problem with availability of taxi service in the downtown and at MARTA stations, there may not be a need to increase the number of permits at this time. The reason is that the operation of the current taxi fleet is inefficient. Many of these taxis sit at the airport for periods of 3 to 4 hours between fares rather than cruising Atlanta's major activity centers seeking patrons. Further, there is little technology implementation in the current taxi fleet and industry designed to improve operational efficiency. Additional studies

should focus on evaluating vehicle activity patterns, demand for service, incentive programs, and application of technology to increase the availability of taxis at activity centers.

For the taxi industry to remain economically viable, taxi stands and waiting areas need to be readily visible. If taxis are not visible and convenient to passengers, passengers are significantly less likely to use the mode. Proper signage and directions to obtain a cab can help increase consumer awareness, but direct visibility of the physical taxi is the most important factor (travel by taxi is often an impulse decision). Thus, industry representatives argue that the taxi waiting areas need to be as close to the passengers as possible and visible to travelers as they depart their previous activity.

The transportation planning process does not directly involve the taxi industry. State and local planning agencies admit that there is no direct involvement of the taxi industry in system design and operation. Even in the case of MARTA station operation, participation of the industry in operational decisions could be improved. Even traffic circulation and enforcement of standing/stopping regulations should be coordinated with the taxi industry. The region should consider supporting the formation of a taxi working group, composed of representatives from the industry and planning agencies. This group would strive to develop cooperation between the industry and various levels of government and would ensure that the concerns of the industry are incorporated into planning efforts.

Appendix A:
Inventory of Taxi and Limousine Companies in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area

County	City	Number of Taxi Companies	Number of Limousine Companies
Georgia Public Service	All Jurisdictions	n/a	n/a
Atlanta City	Atlanta City	24	n/a
Airport Authority	Airport	n/a	n/a
Cherokee County	Unincorporated	3	10
	Ball Ground	0	0
	Canton	1	0
	Holly Springs	0	0
	Nelson	0	0
	Waleska	0	0
	Woodstock	2	1
Clayton County	Unincorporated	4	11
	Forest Park	2	0
	Jonesboro	1	0
	Lake City	0	0
	Lovejoy	0	0
	Morrow	0	0
	Riverdale	1	0
Cobb County	Unincorporated	20	32
	Acworth	0	0
	Austell	1	0
	Kennesaw	0	0
	Marietta	7	6
	Powder Springs	0	3
	Smyrna	7	1
Coweta County	Unincorporated	1	0
	Grantville	0	0
	Haralson	0	0
	Moreland	0	0
	Newnan	0	0
	Senoia	0	0
	Sharpsburg	0	0
	Turin (town of)	0	0
DeKalb County	Unincorporated	31	44
	Avondale Estates	2	1
	Chamblee	7	0
	Clarkston	0	0
	Decatur	2	1
	Doraville	7	0
	Lithonia	2	0
	Pine Lake	0	0
	Stone Mountain	0	0
Douglas County	Unincorporated	0	5
	Douglasville	0	1
	Lithia Springs	0	0
Fayette County	Unincorporated	0	2
	Fayetteville	0	0
	Peachtree City	1	4

Trans/AQ, Inc.

County	City	Number of Taxi Companies	Number of Limousine Companies	
Forsyth County	Unincorporated	7	8	
	Cumming	3	1	
Fulton County	Unincorporated	7	0	
	Alpharetta	0	0	
	College Park	14	0	
	East Point	3	0	
	Fairburn	0	0	
	Hapeville	1	2	
	Mountain Park	0	0	
	Palmetto	0	0	
	Roswell	8	2	
	Union City	1	0	
	Gwinnette County	Unincorporated	9	22
Berkeley Lake		0	0	
Buford		1	0	
Dacula		0	0	
Duluth		1	0	
Grayson		0	0	
Lawrenceville		3	0	
Lilburn		1	0	
Norcross		62	0	
Rest Haven		0	0	
Snellville		2	0	
Sugar Hill		0	1	
Suwanee		0	0	
Henry County		Unincorporated	1	11
		Hampton	0	0
	Locust Grove	0	0	
	McDonough	1	0	
	Stockbridge	1	1	
Paulding County	Unincorporated	0	2	
	Dallas	1	0	
	Hiram	0	0	
Rockdale	Unincorporated	1	1	
	Conyers	4	3	
82 Jurisdictions	Total Companies	258	176	