

# Breaking Ground 2007

*Status Report on Metro Atlanta Transportation Projects in the FY 2006-2011 Transportation Improvement Program*

*Metro Atlanta's growth has greatly challenged its transportation infrastructure, making it crucial to track the progress of project implementation that will increase mobility and better connect the region.*

Months, sometimes years, of work can go into a transportation project before visible construction begins. This report analyzes the progress – from engineering and design to right-of-way acquisition and construction – made on all projects with funding commitments scheduled between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007 (FY 2007) in the region's FY 2006-2011 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

This analysis finds that, for many different reasons, more than half of the region's projects were delayed or dropped entirely. However, transportation agencies across the region and the state are aware of the problem and are working on possible solutions. (For more information on this effort, please see page 4)

*Breaking Ground in 2007* is the fifth annual transportation project advancement progress report for the Atlanta region. With the current growth rate for the Atlanta region, project implementation is crucial to improving quality of life and maintaining the region's economic competitiveness. The purpose of *Breaking Ground* is to encourage the highest possible project advancement rate by:

- providing information which can be used to make realistic assumptions on project implementation schedules, and
- increasing the accountability and transparency of public agencies.

*Breaking Ground* tracks the region's ability to advance projects from the drawing board to construction, providing citizens, elected officials and community leaders with detailed information on the effectiveness of transportation improvement programs. This analysis will help identify additional policies and methods necessary to deliver sustainable mobility options to the region's citizens, businesses and visitors on time and on budget.

## To View the Report

The *Breaking Ground in 2007* data, charts, tables and other summaries are available on ARC's web site [www.atlantaregional.com](http://www.atlantaregional.com). Additional information within the full report includes:

- Status report on each of the 527 projects analyzed
- Detailed analysis of the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program
- Advancement rate by project sponsor
- Advancement rate by funding source
- Projects delayed two or more years in a row
- Historical trends

## Highlights

# 527

Project phases scheduled for FY 2007

# 41%

Percent of phases which actually advanced

# 59%

Percent of phases delayed to FY 2008 or later or dropped entirely

# \$999.1 million

Amount of funding committed to delayed phases

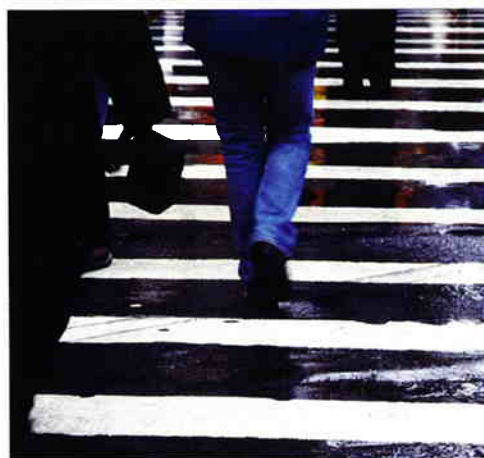
# 16%

Percent of phases which have been delayed two or more years in a row

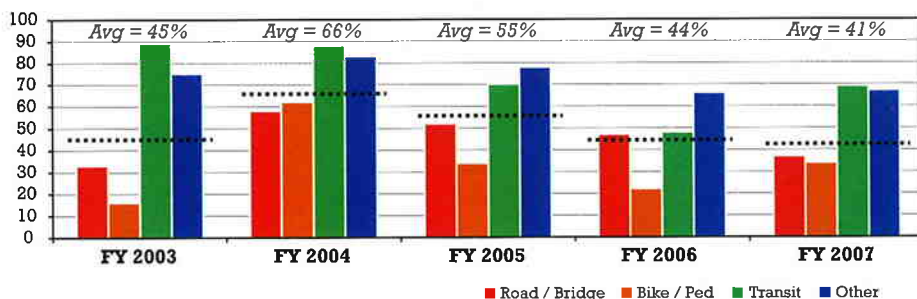


## ARC's Role

By federal law, urbanized areas, such as Atlanta, must develop and implement short-range and long-range transportation plans. While these plans are developed by ARC, the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region, most projects are implemented by various state and local agencies. ARC provides an oversight and reporting role for these activities, of which the *Breaking Ground* report is a key element. The chart below provides a history of advancement rates by project type over the past five years.



### Project Advancement Rate



## Why Progress is Important

Delays prevent much needed projects from being implemented, with the inevitable results of increased congestion, decreased air quality, and increased cost. The region has demonstrated a continuing pattern of project delay. This could lead to difficulty in securing federal transportation plan approvals and funding. To ensure that the implementation process is not stalled, all agencies in the Atlanta region must be diligent in advancing their projects. Failure to obtain federal approval on the TIP places all projects in jeopardy, not just those of a particular agency or type.



## Room for Improvement

The region's advancement rate is significantly below that expected by the public. All implementing agencies have acknowledged the magnitude of the problem and are working diligently to make improvements to their project development processes. Here are just a few examples of the initiatives already underway:

- Assessing the feasibility of completing a concept report for each project before it is included in the regional transportation plan, to ensure accurate scopes and reasonable costs.
- Implementing a more rigorous process for reviewing and approving major scope changes and cost increases.
- Carefully evaluating the benefits of each project and reaching regional consensus on the most cost-effective and sustainable mobility improvements to build first.

## Success Stories

The intent of *Breaking Ground* is not merely to highlight the region's shortcomings in advancing TIP projects. During FY 2007, there were dozens of projects which moved forward into the construction / implementation phase and are either complete or will soon be completed. Following is a sampling of notable projects which have made it through the planning process and have actually succeeded in "breaking ground" over the past year.

### Freeway Capacity

- I-85 in Coweta County
- I-85 northbound auxiliary lane in Gwinnett County

### Interchanges

- I-20 at SR 92 in Douglas County
- I-575 at SR 20 and Towne Lake Parkway in Cherokee County
- I-20 at SR 142 in Newton County

### Local Road Capacity

- Marketplace Boulevard and SR 141 in Forsyth County
- McGinnis Ferry Road in northern Fulton County
- SR 92 in Cherokee County
- Atlanta Road bridge widening over Chattahoochee River

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

- Peachtree Street midblock crossings in downtown Atlanta
- LCI projects in numerous jurisdictions

### Transit

- Memorial Drive bus rapid transit in DeKalb County
- GRTA Xpress bus park and ride lots in several counties
- MARTA station improvements at Kensington and H.E. Holmes

### Other

- Truck stop electrification program
- Regionwide arterial traffic signal optimization program
- Ramp meters on I-75 South, I-20 East, I-20 West and I-285 West
- ITS on US 78 in Gwinnett County and SR 400



### Definitions

A transportation project may have several different stages of development. For example, a roadway widening project typically involves several years of engineering, design and right-of-way acquisition before construction can begin. It is not until this final stage, when there is visible evidence of progress, that most people see the "real work" being done.

ARC uses the term "advancement" in *Breaking Ground* to describe any of three steps:

- The successful initiation of engineering / design activities
- The transition from the engineering / design phase to the right-of-way acquisition phase
- The transition from the right-of-way acquisition phase to the construction / implementation phase

In most cases, it will be obvious to the general public when the project has reached the third and final step of implementation, but the first two steps may not be readily apparent.

### Methodology



In October 2007, data collection began for the *Breaking Ground 2007* report. All project phases that were designated within the FY 2006-2011 TIP to advance to the next phase during FY 2007 (July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007) were identified. The current status of each project was assessed through a review of amendments conducted throughout the year, a comparison to data collected during development of the FY 2008-2013 TIP, an analysis of funding authorization requests processed by the Georgia Department of Transportation and direct coordination with local sponsors. If the phase was delayed or dropped, sponsors were asked to categorize the general reason for the action and

provide additional explanation as necessary to ensure that the full reason for those actions would be fairly and accurately presented in the report.

Projects were categorized into one of the three groups:

**Advancing** - Project with an FY 2007 phase that was begun on schedule.

**Delayed** - Project originally programmed with an FY 2007 phase that was reprogrammed to FY 2008 or later.

**Dropped** - Project dropped entirely from the FY 2006-2011 TIP.

One concern raised by sponsors during the data review process related to whether the delay in an engineering or right-of-way acquisition phase would actually affect the construction schedule, which may still be several years in the future. A delaying in one of the earlier phases may or may not delay the entire project. An analysis of this scenario found that 47% of the delayed FY 2007 phases are projected to cause no change to the estimated completion date.



## For More Information

*ARC welcomes your comments on the contents of this report and questions about the metropolitan transportation planning process.*

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