

# Moving the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Forward:



## Road and Bridge Conditions, Traffic Safety, Travel Trends and Funding Needs in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

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*Founded in 1971, [TRIP](#)® of Washington, DC, is a nonprofit organization that researches, evaluates and distributes economic and technical data on surface transportation issues. TRIP is sponsored by insurance companies, equipment manufacturers, distributors and suppliers; businesses involved in highway and transit engineering and construction; labor unions; and organizations concerned with efficient and safe surface transportation.*

## Introduction

Accessibility and connectivity are critical factors in a region's quality of life and economic competitiveness. The growth and development of a region hinges on the ability of people and businesses to efficiently and safely access employment, customers, commerce, recreation, education and healthcare via multiple transportation modes. The quality of life of residents in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region and the pace of the region's economic growth are directly tied to the condition, efficiency, safety and resiliency of its transportation system. The necessity of a reliable transportation system in Georgia has been reinforced during the coronavirus pandemic, which has placed increased importance on the ability of a region's transportation network to support a reliable supply chain.

Providing a safe, efficient and well-maintained 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system, which will require long-term, sustainable funding, is critical to supporting economic growth, improved safety and quality of life throughout the area. A lack of reliable and adequate transportation funding could jeopardize the condition, efficiency and connectivity of the region's transportation network and hamper economic growth.

TRIP's "Moving the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Forward" report examines travel and population trends, road and bridge conditions, traffic safety, congestion, and transportation funding needs in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region, which is located in the southeast portion of the state and includes the following 17 counties: Appling, Bleckley, Candler, Dodge, Emanuel, Evans, Jeff Davis, Johnson, Laurens, Montgomery, Tattnall, Telfair, Toombs, Treutlen, Wayne, Wheeler and Wilcox.

Sources of information for this report include a survey of county governments by TRIP, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), the American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), the U. S. Census Bureau, the Center for Transportation Studies, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). All data used in the report are the most recent available.

## Population, Travel and Economic Trends in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

To foster quality of life and spur continued economic growth in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region and throughout Georgia, it will be critical that the state provide an efficient, safe and modern transportation system that can accommodate future growth in population, tourism, business, recreation and vehicle travel.

The 17 counties that comprise the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region were home to approximately 299,000 residents in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Vehicle travel in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region totaled 4.5 billion miles in 2018, an increase of 22 percent since 2015.<sup>2</sup>

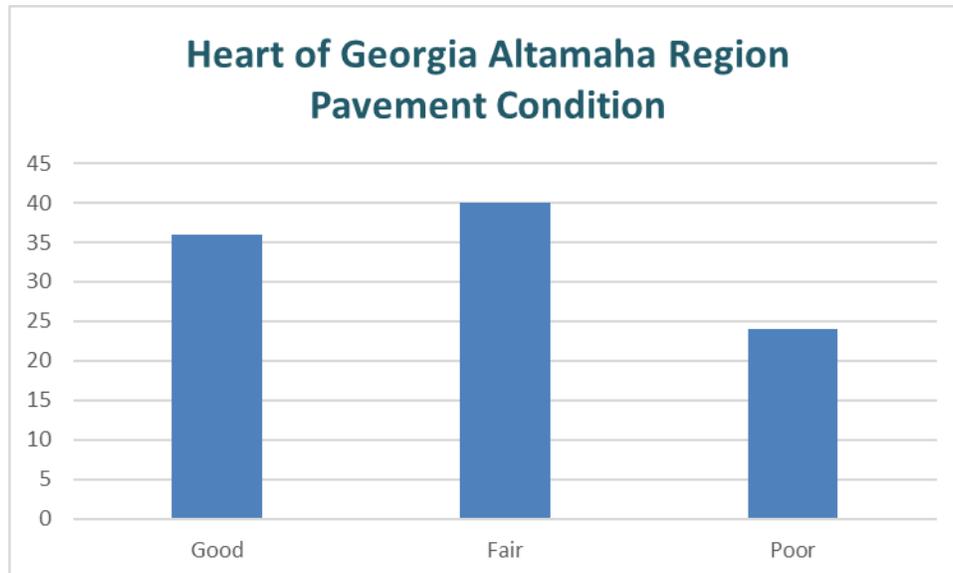
Statewide, Georgia's population grew to approximately 10.5 million residents in 2018, an eight percent increase since 2010.<sup>3</sup> From 2014 to 2018, annual VMT in Georgia increased by 18 percent, to approximately 131 billion miles traveled annually.<sup>4</sup> Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, vehicle travel in Georgia dropped by as much as 38 percent in April 2020 (as compared to vehicle travel during the same month the previous year), but rebounded to 12 percent below the previous year's volume in August 2020.<sup>5</sup>

### Pavement Conditions in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

The life cycle of Georgia's roads is greatly affected by state and local governments' ability to perform timely maintenance and upgrades to ensure that road and highway surfaces last as long as possible.

Based on results of a TRIP survey of Georgia counties conducted in late 2019 and early 2020, TRIP has calculated the share of county-maintained roads in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region in poor, fair and good condition. Survey responses from the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region indicate that 24 percent of county-maintained roads are in poor condition, 40 percent are in fair condition, and 36 percent are in good condition.<sup>6</sup>

**Chart 1. Share of county-maintained roads in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region in poor, fair or good condition.**



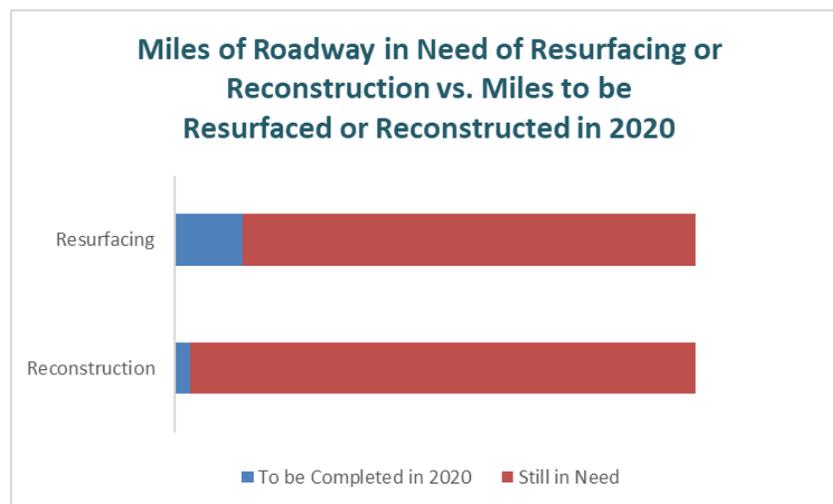
**Source: TRIP survey of Georgia counties, conducted December 2019 - February 2020.**

Roads rated in poor condition may show signs of deterioration, including rutting, cracks and potholes. In some cases, poor roads can be resurfaced but often are too deteriorated and must be reconstructed. Roads rated in fair condition may show signs of significant wear and may also have some

visible pavement distress. Most pavements in fair condition can be repaired by resurfacing, but some may need more extensive reconstruction to return them to good condition.

TRIP's survey of county governments in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region found that, of the miles of county-maintained roadway in need of resurfacing, current budgets will only allow for resurfacing of 13 percent of those miles in 2020.<sup>7</sup> And, of the miles of county-maintained roadway in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region in need of reconstruction, only three percent will be able to be reconstructed in 2020 under current funding conditions.<sup>8</sup>

**Chart 2. Share of roads in need of resurfacing or reconstruction in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region vs. share of Heart of Georgia Altamaha region roads that are expected to be resurfaced or reconstructed in 2020.**

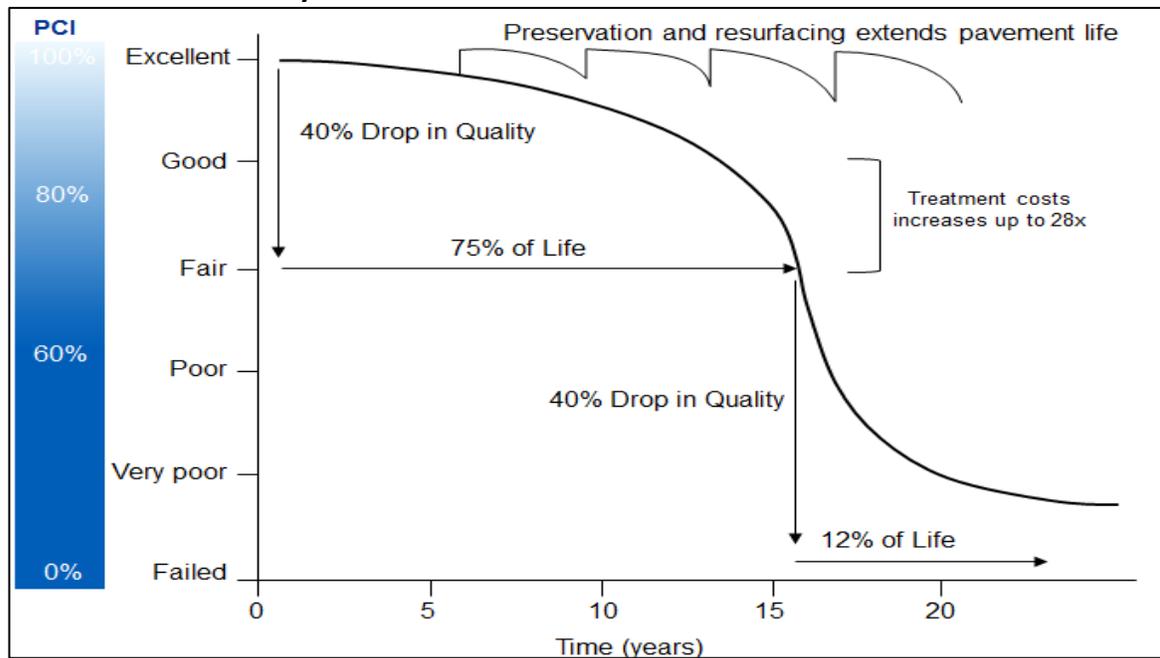


**Source: TRIP survey of Georgia counties, conducted December 2019 - February 2020.**

Pavement failure is caused by a combination of traffic, moisture and climate. Moisture often works its way into road surfaces and the materials that form the road's foundation. Road surfaces at intersections are more prone to deterioration because the slow-moving or standing loads occurring at these sites subject the pavement to higher levels of stress. It is critical that roads are fixed before they require major repairs because reconstructing roads costs approximately four times more than resurfacing them.<sup>9</sup> As roads and highways continue to age, they will reach a point of deterioration where routine paving and maintenance will not be adequate to keep pavement surfaces in good condition and costly reconstruction of the roadway and its underlying surfaces will become necessary.

TRIP's survey of Heart of Georgia Altamaha counties indicates that the amount of money anticipated to be spent in 2020 on roads, highways and bridges is only 34 percent of the total amount that needs to be spent to make significant progress towards achieving a state of good repair for roads, highways and bridges.

**Chart 3. Pavement Condition Cycle Time with Treatment and Cost**



Source: North Carolina Department of Transportation (2016). [2016 Maintenance Operations and Performance Analysis Report](#)

Long-term repair costs increase significantly when road and bridge maintenance is deferred, as road and bridge deterioration accelerates later in the service life of a transportation facility and requires more costly repairs. A [report on maintaining pavements](#) found that every \$1 of deferred maintenance on roads and bridges costs an additional \$4 to \$5 in needed future repairs.<sup>10</sup>



### Bridge Conditions in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

Bridges form key links in the region's highway system, providing communities and individuals access to employment, schools, shopping and medical facilities, and facilitating commerce and access for emergency vehicles.

In the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, a total of eight percent (91 of 1,199) of locally and state-maintained bridges are rated as deficient.<sup>11</sup> This includes all bridges that are 20 feet or more in length. Each day, 135,000 vehicles travel over deficient bridges in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region.<sup>12</sup>

A bridge is deemed deficient if it meets at least one of the following criteria: The physical condition of a bridge deck, superstructure or substructure is rated a 4 or below on a scale of nine, indicating significant deterioration of a major component of the bridge; A bridge is restricted to carrying only lighter-weight vehicles; A bridge has a carrying capacity of 18 tons or less which restricts it from carrying larger commercial vehicles.

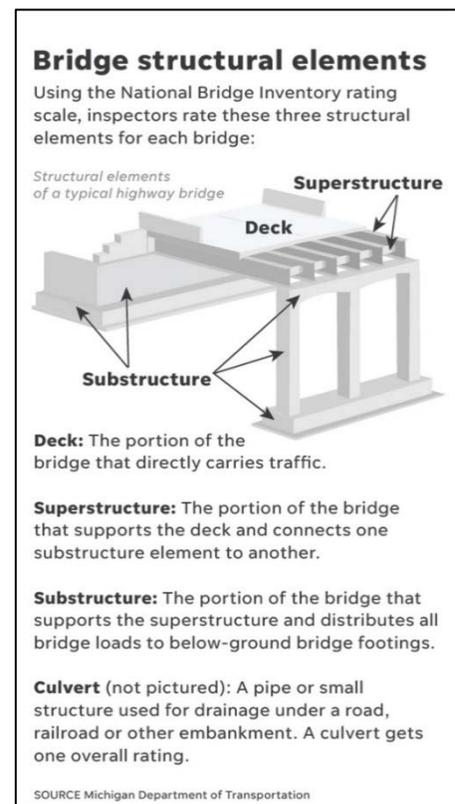
In the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, 34 bridges received a score of 4 or below for the condition of the bridge deck, superstructure or substructure; 55 bridges have a carrying capacity of 18 tons or less; and 94 bridges are restricted to carrying only lower-weight vehicles.<sup>13</sup>

Statewide, ten percent (1,551 of 14,799) of Georgia's locally and state-maintained bridges are rated in deficient condition.<sup>14</sup>

Bridges that are deficient may be posted for lower weight limits or closed if their condition warrants such action. Deteriorated bridges can have a significant impact on daily life. Restrictions on vehicle weight may cause many vehicles – especially emergency vehicles, commercial trucks, school buses and farm equipment – to use alternate routes to avoid posted bridges. Redirected trips also lengthen travel time, waste fuel and reduce the efficiency of the local economy. Bridges that have a carrying capacity below 18 tons largely are unable to carry large commercial vehicles, which can harm a region's economic competitiveness by restricting access for commercial goods.

The service life of bridges can be extended by performing routine maintenance such as resurfacing decks, painting surfaces, ensuring that a facility has good drainage and replacing deteriorating components. But most bridges will eventually require more costly reconstruction or major rehabilitation to remain operable.

The chart below ranks the 40 most deficient bridges (carrying a minimum of 500 vehicles per day) in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region based on the number of categories where the bridge ranked



“deficient” (P = physical condition of deck, superstructure or substructure based on a rating of 4 or below for its deck, substructure or superstructure; C = the carrying capacity of the bridge is 18 tons or less; R = the bridge is restricted to only carrying lighter -weight vehicles), and average daily traffic (ADT).

**Chart 4. Most deficient bridges in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region.**

Deficiency Noted	Rank	County	Facility Carried	Feature Intersected	Location	Year Built	ADT
PCR	1	Laurens	NORTH P'TREE ROAD	BREWTON CREEK	.4 MI N OF BREWTON	1950	735
PCR	2	Laurens	ROCK SPRINGS ROAD	FLAT CREEK	12 MI SE OF DUBLIN	1957	735
PCR	3	Laurens	LOWERY FIREHOUSE R	OKEEWALKEE CREEK	19.6 MI S OF DUBLIN	1950	735
PCR	4	Laurens	LORD DEXTER ROAD	BUCKHORN BRANCH	4.6 MI S OF DUDLEY	1950	735
PCR	5	Laurens	CR 348	ROCKY CREEK	4.6 MI S OF DUDLEY	1950	735
PCR	6	Treutlen	CR 139	TIGER CREEK	SE SOPERTON CITY LIMITS	1950	735
PCR	7	Tattnall	HILLVIEW ROAD	CEDAR CREEK	3 MI N OF COLLINS	1955	690
PCR	8	Candler	FORTNERS ROAD	MILL BRANCH	1.5 MI S OF METTER	1937	675
PR	9	Wayne	US 84 (WBL)	LITTLE McMULLEN CREEK	IN CITY LIMITS OF JESUP	1957	27,780
CR	10	Evans	SR 169	CANOOCHEE RIVER	4 MI N OF CLAXTON	1958	2,835
CR	11	Johnson	CROSS CEDAR RD	BIG CEDAR CREEK	EAST EDGE OF WRIGHTSVILLE	1964	1425
CR	12	Emanuel	FORTUNE LOOP STREET	ROCK CREEK TRIB.	AT LAKE LUCK-SWAINSBORO	1980	1380
CR	13	Evans	FAS 2493	CANOOCHEE RIVER	2 MI N OF CLAXTON	1966	1365
CR	14	Wayne	OGLETHORP ROAD	LITTLE GOOSE CREEK	5.5 MI NW OF JESUP	1959	1305
CR	15	Candler	CR 28	FIFTEEN MILE CREEK	3.6 MI SE OF METTER	1963	1230
CR	16	Candler	DUTCH FORD ROAD	FIFTEEN MILE CREEK O/F	3.7 MI SE OF METTER	1963	1230
CR	17	Evans	FAS 1603	CANOOCHEE RIVER	8 MI NW OF CLAXTON	1969	1065
CR	18	Johnson	US 221	BATTLE GROUND CREEK	.8 MI N OF KITE	1963	915
CR	19	Emanuel	MCGARPH MILL POND	DANIELS MILL CREEK	2 MI NW OF SUMMERTOWN	1959	810
CR	20	Emanuel	FRIENDSHIP CH ROAD	FIFTEEN MILE CREEK	4.1 MI NE OF TWIN CITY	1963	735
CR	21	Laurens	HOLIDAY ROAD	TURKEY CREEK OVERFLOW	6.2 MI S OF DUBLIN	1920	735
CR	22	Laurens	HOLIDAY ROAD	TURKEY CREEK	6.4 MI S OF DUBLIN	1920	735
CR	23	Laurens	HOLIDAY ROAD	TURKEY CREEK OVERFLOW	6.5 MI S OF DUBLIN	1920	735
CR	24	Laurens	HOLIDAY ROAD	TURKEY CREEK OVERFLOW	6.5 MI S OF DUBLIN	1920	735
PR	25	Treutlen	KNOX MILL ROAD	ROCKY CREEK	3.1 MI NW OF SOPERTON	1960	735
CR	26	Wayne	GRANTHAM ROAD	LITTLE McMULLEN CREEK	NE CITY LIMITS OF JESUP	1960	720
CR	27	Dodge	CHAUNCY-RHINE HWY	SUGAR CREEK	1 MI SW OF CHAUNCEY	1963	540
C	28	Jeff Davis	US 23 SBL	OCMULGEE RVR OVERFLOW	5.6 MI NW OF HAZLEHURST	1985	9705
C	29	Laurens	SR 257	TURKEY CREEK	5 MI NE OF DEXTER	1977	9300
C	30	Wayne	SR 169	GOOSE CREEK	4 MI N OF JESUP	1950	4740
P	31	Jeff Davis	US 221/ SR 135	ALTAMAHA RIVER	7.5 MI NE OF HAZLEHURST	1952	4275
R	32	Emanuel	LAMBS BRIDGE ROAD	CANOOCHEE CREEK	4.4 MI NE OF SWAINSBORO	1958	3420
R	33	Emanuel	LAMBS BRIDGE ROAD	LITTLE CANOOCHEE CREEK	3.7 MI SW OF TWIN CITY	1959	3420
R	34	Candler	PORTAL HIGHWAY	FIFTEEN MILE CREEK	1.7 MI NE OF METTER	1971	2970
R	35	Candler	PORTAL HIGHWAY	FIFTEEN MILE CREEK O/F	1.8 MI NE OF METTER	1971	2970
R	36	Toombs	THOMPSON POND RD	SWIFT CREEK TRIB.	2.3 MI N OF VIDALIA	1948	2970
R	37	Appling	COUNTY FARM ROAD	SWEETWATER CREEK	1 MI SW OF BAXLEY	1963	2100
P	38	Laurens	N. FRANKLIN STREET	HUNGER & HARDSHIP CRK	IN DUBLIN	1936	1995
R	39	Appling	COUNTY FARM ROAD	BLACK WATER CREEK	2 MI SW OF BAXLEY	1963	1635
R	40	Candler	STILLMORE HIGHWAY	CANOOCHEE RIVER	5 MI W OF METTER	1965	1260

**Source: List of deficient bridges provided by Georgia Department of Transportation. Rankings calculated by TRIP.**

## Traffic Safety in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

A total of 349 people were killed in traffic crashes in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region from 2014 to 2018, an average of 70 fatalities per year.<sup>15</sup> The Heart of Georgia Altamaha region had a traffic fatality rate of 1.57 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2018, higher than the statewide fatality rate of 1.14 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2018.<sup>16</sup>

**Chart 5. Traffic Fatalities in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, 2014 – 2018.**

Year	Fatalities
2014	64
2015	72
2016	60
2017	82
2018	71
<b>Average</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>349</b>

**Source: TRIP analysis of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data.**

Three major factors are associated with fatal vehicle crashes: driver behavior, vehicle characteristics and roadway features. It is estimated that roadway features are likely a contributing factor in approximately one-third of fatal traffic crashes. Roadway features that impact safety include the number of lanes, lane widths, lighting, lane markings, rumble strips, shoulders, guard rails, other shielding devices, median barriers and intersection design.

Improving safety on Georgia's roadways can be achieved through further improvements in vehicle safety; improvements in driver, pedestrian, and bicyclist behavior; and, a variety of improvements in roadway safety features. The severity of serious traffic crashes could be reduced through roadway improvements, where appropriate, such as converting intersections to roundabouts; removing or shielding roadside objects; the addition of left-turn lanes at intersections; the signalization of intersections; adding or improving median barriers; improved lighting; adding centerline or shoulder rumble strips; providing appropriate pedestrian and bicycle facilities, including sidewalks and bicycle lanes; providing wider lanes, wider and paved shoulders; upgrading roads from two lanes to four lanes; providing better road and lane markings; and updating rail crossings.

The U.S. has a \$146 billion backlog in needed roadway safety improvements, according to a 2017 [report](#) from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. The report found implementing these cost-effective and needed roadway safety improvements on U.S. roadways would save approximately 63,700 lives and reduce the number of serious injuries as a result of traffic crashes by approximately 350,000 over 20 years.

## Importance of Transportation System to Development in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

Reliable highway access is critical to the economic development of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. At a time when a significant increase in freight deliveries are forecast for Georgia, the quality of a region's transportation system will have a significant impact on its ability to attract economic development

The amount of freight transported in Georgia and the rest of the U.S. is expected to increase significantly as a result of further economic growth, changing business and retail models, increasing international trade, and rapidly changing consumer expectations that place an emphasis on faster deliveries, often of smaller packages or payloads.

Every year, \$843 billion in goods are shipped to and from sites in Georgia, mostly by trucks.<sup>17</sup> Seventy-six percent of freight delivered to or from sites in Georgia are shipped by truck and another 14 percent are shipped by multiple modes, including trucking.<sup>18</sup> The value of freight shipped to and from sites in Georgia, in inflation-adjusted dollars, is expected to increase 115 percent by 2045 and by 89 percent for goods shipped by trucks.<sup>19</sup> But the ability of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha's freight transportation system to efficiently and safely accommodate the growing demand for freight movement could be hampered by deficient roads and bridges, including bridges that are not able to carry large commercial vehicles.

The need to improve the region's freight network is occurring at a time when the nation's freight delivery system is being transformed by advances in vehicle autonomy, manufacturing, warehousing and supply chain automation, increasing e-commerce, and the growing logistic networks being developed by Amazon and other retail organizations in response to the demand for a faster and more responsive delivery and logistics cycle.

Investments in transportation improvements in Georgia play a critical role in the state's economy. A [report](#) by the American Road & Transportation Builders Association found that the design, construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure supports the equivalent of approximately 110,000 full-time jobs across all sectors of the state economy, earning these workers approximately \$3.9 billion annually.<sup>20</sup> These jobs include approximately 55,000 full-time jobs directly involved in transportation infrastructure construction and related activities. Spending by employees and companies in the transportation design and construction industry supports an additional 55,000 full-time jobs in Georgia.<sup>21</sup> Transportation construction in Georgia contributes an estimated \$703 million annually in state and local income, corporate and unemployment insurance taxes and the federal payroll tax.<sup>22</sup>

Approximately 1.9 million full-time jobs in Georgia in key industries like tourism, retail sales, agriculture and manufacturing are dependent on the quality, safety and reliability of the state's transportation infrastructure network.

Local, regional and state economic performance is improved when a region's surface transportation system is expanded or repaired. This improvement comes as a result of the initial job creation and increased employment created over the long-term because of improved access, reduced transport costs and improved safety.

Increasingly, companies are looking at the quality of a region's transportation system when deciding where to re-locate or expand. Regions with congested or poorly maintained roads may see businesses relocate to areas with a smoother, more efficient and more modern transportation system. Highway accessibility was ranked the number one site selection factor in a 2020 [survey](#) of corporate executives by Area Development Magazine.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

As the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region looks to support further economic and population growth, it will be critical that the region is able to provide a well-maintained, safe and efficient 21<sup>st</sup> century network of roads, highways, bridges and transit that can accommodate the mobility demands of a modern society.

A robust and reliable transportation system that is maintained in good condition, can accommodate large commercial vehicles, and is reliable and safe is vital to the quality of life of Heart of Georgia Altamaha residents, the success and growth of businesses and the positive experience of its visitors.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2018).
- <sup>2</sup> Georgia Department of Transportation.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2018).
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration: Highway Statistics 2000 and 2018.
- <sup>5</sup> [Federal Highway Administration – Traffic Volume Trends](#).
- <sup>6</sup> TRIP survey of Georgia counties, December 2019-February 2020.
- <sup>7</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>8</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>9</sup> Selecting a Preventative Maintenance Treatment for Flexible Pavements. R. Hicks, J. Moulthrop. Transportation Research Board. 1999. Figure 1.
- <sup>10</sup> [Pavement Maintenance](#), by David P. Orr, PE Senior Engineer, Cornell Local Roads Program, March 2006.
- <sup>11</sup> Georgia Department of Transportation.
- <sup>12</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>13</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>14</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>15</sup> Federal Highway Administration National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2014-2018.
- <sup>16</sup> Federal Highway Administration National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2014-2018. County VMT data comes from the Georgia Department of Transportation.
- <sup>17</sup> TRIP analysis of Federal Highway Administration’s Freight Analysis Framework data (2018). Data is for 2016. <https://faf.ornl.gov/fafweb/>.
- <sup>18</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>19</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>20</sup> American Road & Transportation Builders Association (2015). The 2015 U.S. Transportation Construction Industry Profile. [https://www.transportationcreatesjobs.org/pdf/Economic\\_Profile.pdf](https://www.transportationcreatesjobs.org/pdf/Economic_Profile.pdf)
- <sup>21</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>22</sup> [Ibid.](#)
- <sup>23</sup> Area Development Magazine (2020). 34th Annual Survey of Corporate Executives: Availability of Skilled Labor New Top Priority. <https://www.areadevelopment.com/Corporate-Consultants-Survey-Results/Q1-2020/34th-annual-corporate-survey-16th-annual-consultants-survey.shtml>