

This week saw the beginning of early voting in Cobb County. With it comes a push by the county commission to vote for a transit tax that if approved would impose a one percent sales tax for the next 30 years. Think about that for a moment; your middle schooler would be in their mid 40s at the end of the tax.

There are many issues I see with this proposed transit tax. First, and foremost is calling it an MSPLOST. By definition, a SPLOST is a **Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax**. Many will remember my numerous NO votes for previous SPLOST proposals because I felt that the project list was mostly wants and not needs. In most cases there wasn't anything special about the projects, they were just other ways to spend money. This proposal is a long way from the intent of a SPLOST. One of the glaring differences is that the newly created ATL must approve all projects before they can receive funding. The **ATL** is the new regional Transit Authority that has complete control over the allocation of all state transportation funds. Without their approval a transportation project can't receive state funding. The majority of the ATL committee members are not from Cobb. So how are they going to know what is in the best interest for Cobb related to transit related projects?

Second, is the amount of time for this proposal. No one can possibly know what the transit or transportation needs of Cobb County will be over the next 30 years. Who knows, with the advances in AI and technology like Tesla cars we could all be moving around like George Jetson by then. This issue is like what happened when the current SPLOST was brought before the commissioners. There was still two years remaining before the existing SPLOST was to end. This meant that the proposed six-year SPLOST was attempting to look 8 years into the future. The residents of East Cobb know how a SPLOST project can become obsolete and not necessary. Just look at the Lower Roswell Road median/widening project. I fought it for almost 8 years as being unnecessary and damaging to the local businesses. Now after over a decade the county is moving forward with the project regardless of its impact to the community. There are many other projects from previous SPLOSTs that were proposed and ultimately deemed obsolete.

Third, let's talk about the busses. The current county bus service is supplemented from the county general fund, your taxes to the tune of \$29 million dollars annually. And as reported in the MDJ, runs mostly empty. Ever wonder why the bus windows are now tinted? That way you can't see the empty seats inside. To be fair, there are two routes, Route 10 and route 30 that have a fair number of riders. Why would you add more busses to a system that is seeing declining ridership, increased costs, and broken fare boxes? One has to wonder how much more county subsidies were needed to operate the system with these broken fare boxes. These county subsidies are our money! Another important thing to mention here is the \$29 million subsidy. The proposal states that the operational costs of the bus service would be rolled into the transit tax. Who can tell me what the commissioners have said will happen to the \$29 million currently coming from the General Fund? The obvious answer is more county spending on things we don't need. It would probably go the way of the water transfer with the

commissioners telling us they need the money to balance the budget. Just another money grab.

Fourth, is the whole transit system proposal. Show me a transportation related industry, whether it is an airline, railroad, shipping company, etc., that decides to start service where there is no indication it is needed. How quickly do you think they would go bust? Many proponents will tell you transit will bring new development. Does Cobb County need more development and its associated traffic? Transportation companies know that you come into areas where people are and go to where they want to go. You can't create new pathways. The biggest need in Cobb is transportation between the Cumberland/Galleria area and Hartsfield Jackson International airport. This proposal is silent on any direct links. Additionally, here in East Cobb and many other suburban parts of the county, transit and transportation must compete with the car to be remotely successful. This transit tax is just like many of the others; it can't compete. We saw this played out with the last TSPLOST proposal that wanted to bring light rail into Cobb County. Many studies showed it wouldn't solve the traffic problem and couldn't compete with the car.

Finally, lets talk traffic. How many of you have been stuck behind one of the county busses that just stop in a travel lane? They sit there their allotted time, even though no one is at the stop, because they must maintain a schedule. Look at some of the articles in the MDJ where the reporter rode the system. It took infinitely longer to go from point to point. Do you really want more busses and light rail on our existing roads? Proponents say this transit tax will improve traffic and make our area better. I have yet to see any data that supports those claims.

I spent 12 years on the board of commissioners and during that time I watched as staff and some of my fellow commissioners chased after the shiny rings put forth by the consultants and recent graduates. Think about who benefits from all these taxes, the consultants who design and ultimately build all these projects. Did you know that most of them have offices in the county DOT offices. They are involved from the very beginning on every one of these projects. I battled with them on numerous occasions during my tenure.

There are some transportation projects that would benefit the county. They have been discussed for many years. One is a grade separation of Windy Hill Road and US 41. Another is to finish widening Upper Roswell Rd (120) to the Fulton County line. They are expensive projects but don't need a 30-year tax to be completed. A proper review of county needs vs wants is needed long before giving the county and the commissioners any more of our hard-earned money. This transit tax is a bad idea and needs to be defeated.

I ask you to join me in voting NO on the proposed transit tax on November 5.

Bob Ott  
Former District 2 Commissioner

