

January 19, 2007
Marietta Daily Journal

Editorial

Perdue should heed Olens advice on roads

Cobb Commission Chairman Sam Olens sent a pointed letter to Gov. Sonny Perdue this month regarding the county's traffic congestion. We hope the governor takes the time to read it closely.

Olens asked in his Jan. 5 letter that the governor prod the state Department of Transportation to move more quickly on road projects.

Pointing out that although much media attention has been focused on the \$7.7 billion state and federal transportation-funding shortfall, "we also face a huge hurdle with regard to program delivery."

"When it takes two years for permission to let right-turn improvements on a state road and the construction (only) takes two weeks, there is simply something wrong with the process," Olens wrote.

The chairman also noted that the DOT's tardiness means that the cost of road projects rises due to inflation past what was originally set aside.

"We have the fourth-worst congestion in the country; we're the fourth-fastest-growing region in the country and we have the fourth-lowest transportation inventory," Olens said. "Add that to program delivery, and we're further behind each year."

One of the biggest impacts has been on plans to add High-Occupancy Vehicle lanes on Interstate 75. The plans have been delayed year after year due partly to a state requirement that each congressional district in Georgia get an equal share of federal transportation funding. That rule penalizes the traffic-choked metro counties at the expense of rural areas where relatively cheap farm-to-market roads are the biggest need.

The delays thus far have cost Cobb more than \$100 million, Olens wrote.

The chairman also would like to see the state privatize some of its road-engineering and design so the DOT could concentrate on construction management.

"Privatizing engineering would avoid the bureaucracy," Olens said. "Funding in and of itself doesn't solve the problem; you need funding and efficiency."

Those are good suggestions from Cobb's chairman, the man ultimately responsible for the completion of the projects funded by the 1 percent Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax for road/jail/courthouse improvements that was approved by county voters in 2005.

As we noted above, we hope the governor gives the chairman's letter the attention it deserves.