

Mass transit is the wrong direction for Cobb

On March 2 of this year, just a few days before the coronavirus upended our lives, this paper ran a front-page article about a new group, Cobb 4 Transit, which was formed to promote more mass transit in Cobb County. While such an issue right now is taking a back seat to the current pandemic, this too shall pass, and when it does, we will need to focus on other issues affecting our quality of life in Cobb.

The prospect of massive transfusions of taxpayer money for mass transit may come to a head as early as November 2022, which is when the county's Board of Commissioners is looking to put what it calls a "Mobility SPLOST" on the ballot. While the details are yet to be worked out, the most likely possibility is to impose an additional 1% sales tax on top of our current 6% levy, with half going toward transportation infrastructure and the other half going towards further expansion of mass transit for the next 30 years!

While a hyper-expensive mass transit system may make sense in densely populated cities like New York and to a lesser extent, Atlanta, it makes no sense in what is quint-

essentially a suburban county like Cobb. People choose to live in Cobb because of a superior quality of life without the high taxes, crime, crumbling infrastructure and unaffordable housing "enjoyed" by our neighbors to the east.

And yet no one can argue that traffic congestion is a problem that needs to be addressed. The assumption by mass transit advocates is that with more of it, people will leave their car at home and take the bus. However, even for the commuters who now take Cobb Transit to work, the overwhelming majority of them do so out of economic necessity, and aspire to the day when they can enjoy the comfort, convenience and dramatically shorter commute times the comes with owning their own car.

The only way more mass transit would make sense in Cobb would be to emulate Atlanta, with lots of high-density high rises and a plethora of leased apartment complexes. If that were to happen, then the reason most of us choose to live here — to have a piece of the American dream with a single-family



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affordable home in beautiful residential neighborhood — would go by the wayside. Is that what we really want for Cobb?

Moreover, the irony is that spending billions over the next 30 years to transform Cobb into an urban versus a suburban community would not even reduce traffic congestion because it would not get us out of our cars. There is a popular assumption that with mass transit, other people would take the bus, but woefully few of us would do so because no matter how you cut it, commute times by bus takes two to three times as long as the personal automobile. You then need to ask yourself, how much does this waste of time impact us on a personal level, taking time away from leisure activities and quality time with our families?

On the contrary, the solution to addressing traffic congestion in Cobb is to improve auto mobility since that is the far and away the preferred mode of transportation. This can be accomplished by implementing market-based creative solutions such as more

managed lanes (a huge success in the I-75 corridor), roundabouts, synchronized traffic signals and breathtaking new technologies now only in their concept stages such as self-driving cars. In fact, thanks to the coronavirus, we are now learning at long last the virtue and feasibility of telecommuting, which by itself has and will reduce congestion by as much as 10 to 15%.

The dirty little secret behind the drive for mass transit in Cobb is to bring MARTA here to help stem the billions in red ink this agency has been spilling in our neighboring counties. I for one do not favor bailing out this money losing bureaucracy on the backs of Cobb taxpayers and invite you to join the Cobb Taxpayers Association in opposing this assault on our wallets. And to the folks who formed Cobb 4 Transit, let me take this opportunity to inform them that the battle has been joined.

Lance Lamberton is the chairman of the Cobb Taxpayers Association, an organization that was founded in 2005 to oppose wasteful and unnecessary government spending.