

# REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

January 2012

## Metro Atlanta and Congestion: How We Compare and Compete

This *Regional Snapshot* looks at several of different sources of traffic congestion data and finds that metro Atlanta remains one of the most congested places in the country, and the most congested area in the Southeast. It also shows the strong link between congestion and jobs – those places with the largest job bases tend to have more congestion.

The data analyzed here come from the American Community Survey, the American Transportation Research Institute and the most recent Urban Mobility Report from the Texas Transportation Institute. They show various measures of congestion at the metro level to show how Atlanta compares nationally. They also give clues to how Atlanta may compete with other metros in attracting new or relocating business.

### METRO ATLANTA RANKS IN TOP 20 PERCENT FOR CONGESTION COST

By assigning a dollar amount to time spent in congestion, the Texas Transportation Institute estimates a congestion cost for each metro area using a formula that takes into account both time and wasted fuel. For a full discussion of the methodology, go to <http://mobility.tamu.edu/ums/>. As Figure 1 shows, metro Atlanta (the red dot in Georgia) ranks in the highest range (top 20 percent) in cost of congestion per commuter in 2010, and one of the highest in the Southeast.

### STRONG LINK BETWEEN CONGESTION AND JOBS

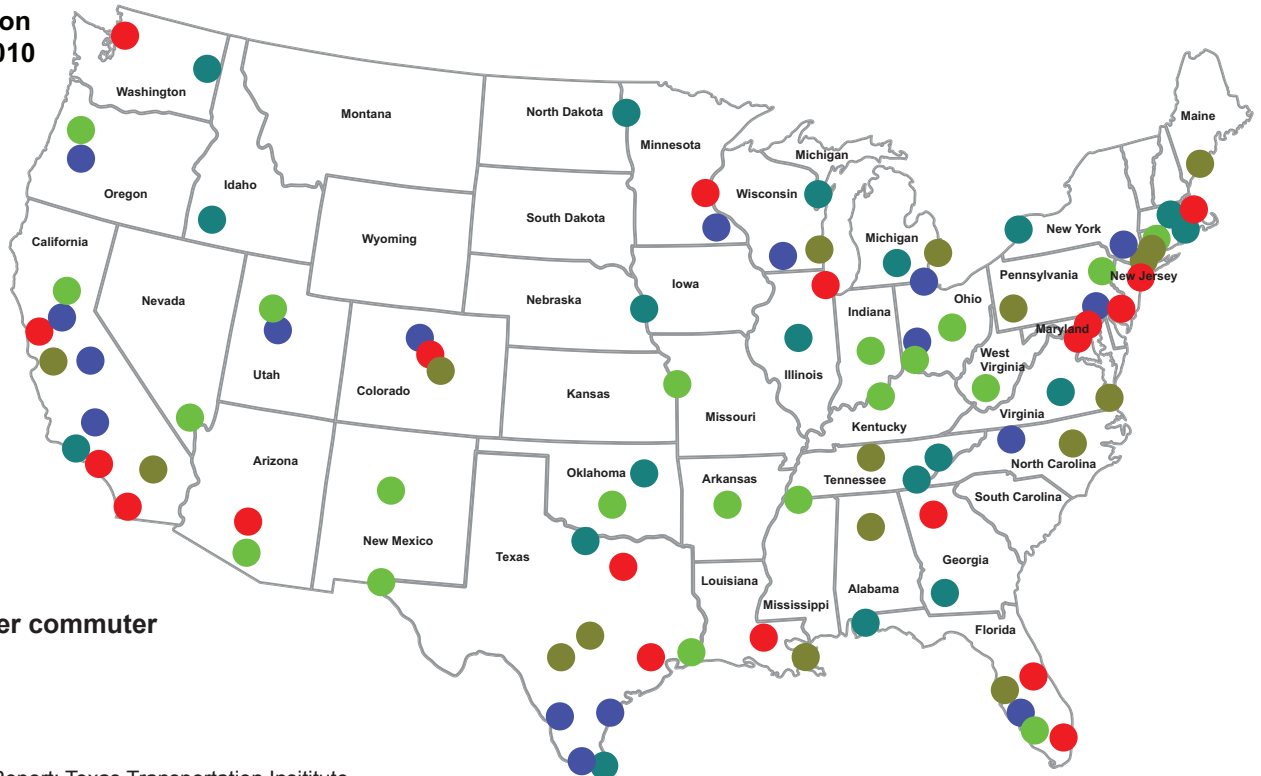
One characteristic shared by the most congested areas in the nation is an abundance of jobs. As Table 1 shows, areas with the most jobs tend to also have the most congestion. This relationship, for the most part, holds for all of the largest urban areas in Table 1 (on the next page). Atlanta ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in the total hours of delay due to traffic congestion among the 15 largest urban areas in the nation, while ranking 9<sup>th</sup> in total number of jobs.

Figure 1 – Congestion Cost Per Commuter by Urban Area

#### Cost of Congestion per commuter, 2010

- 785 to 1,568
- 533 to < 785
- 427 to < 533
- 321 to < 427
- 125 to < 321

Atlanta = \$924 per commuter



Source: Urban Mobility Report; Texas Transportation Institute

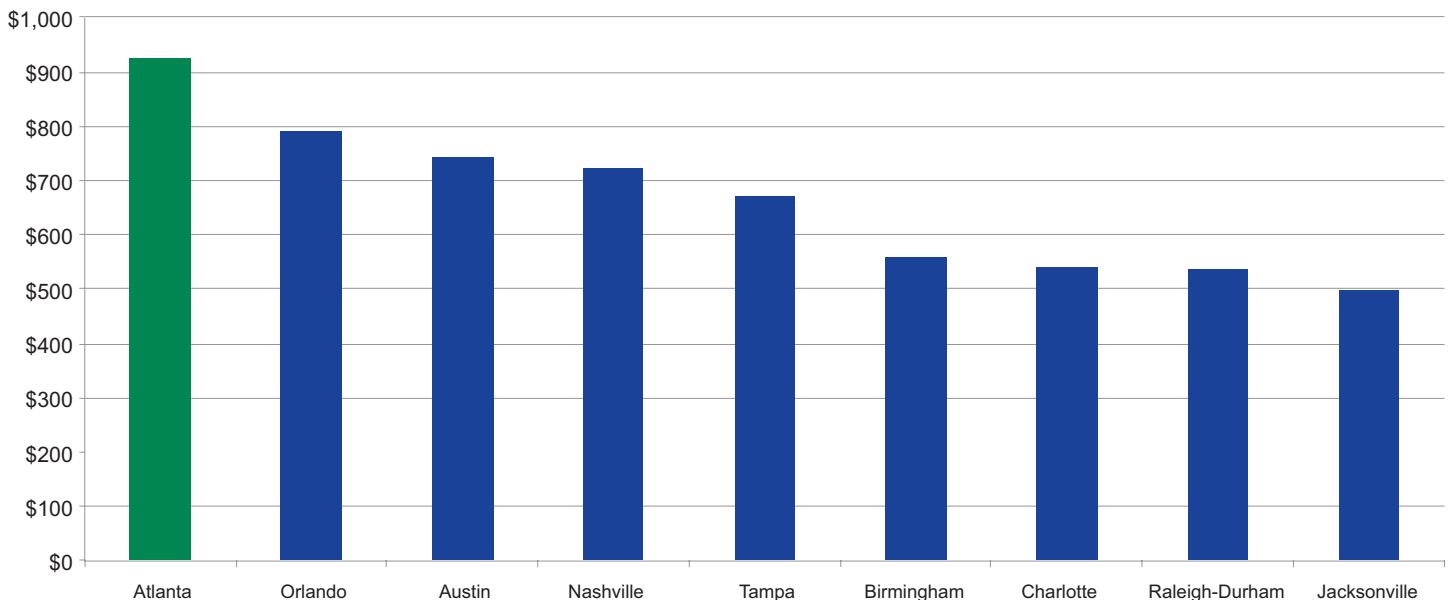
**Table 1 – Hours of Delay and Total Employment, 2010 (Largest Urban Areas)**

| Metro Area     | Hours of Delay, 2010 |           | Total Employment, 2010 |          |
|----------------|----------------------|-----------|------------------------|----------|
|                | Total (000)          | Rank      | Total                  | Rank     |
| Los Angeles    | 521,449              | 1         | 5,120,600              | 2        |
| New York       | 465,564              | 2         | 8,298,800              | 1        |
| Chicago        | 367,122              | 3         | 4,248,100              | 3        |
| Washington, DC | 188,650              | 4         | 2,964,100              | 4        |
| Dallas         | 163,585              | 5         | 2,862,400              | 5        |
| Houston        | 153,391              | 6         | 2,529,200              | 7        |
| Miami          | 139,764              | 7         | 2,183,300              | 10       |
| Philadelphia   | 134,899              | 8         | 2,697,500              | 6        |
| San Francisco  | 120,149              | 9         | 1,883,600              | 11       |
| Boston         | 117,234              | 10        | 2,425,900              | 8        |
| <b>Atlanta</b> | <b>115,958</b>       | <b>11</b> | <b>2,258,300</b>       | <b>9</b> |
| Seattle        | 87,919               | 12        | 1,636,000              | 14       |
| Detroit        | 87,572               | 13        | 1,732,100              | 12       |
| Phoenix        | 81,829               | 14        | 1,686,800              | 13       |
| San Diego      | 72,995               | 15        | 1,220,200              | 15       |

Source: 2011 Urban Mobility Report, Texas Transportation Institute; Bureau of Labor Statistics

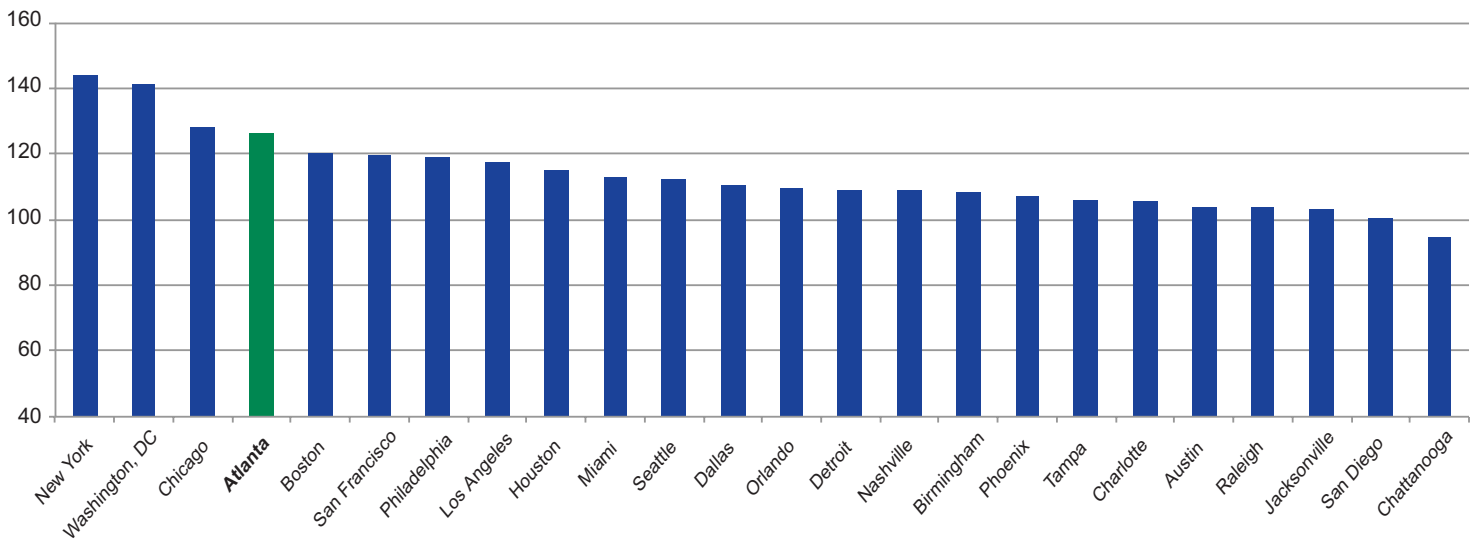
Chart 1 compares congestion cost per commuter for selected metros in the Southeast. As can be seen, metro Atlanta commuters have the highest congestion cost of any Southeastern metro, more than \$100 higher than Orlando, the second-highest on the list.

**Chart 1 – Congestion Cost Per Commuter, 2010 - Selected Southeastern Urban Areas**



Source: 2011 Urban Mobility Report, Texas Transportation Institute

Chart 2 – Total Hours Spent Driving To Work Per Year



Source: 2010 American Community Survey

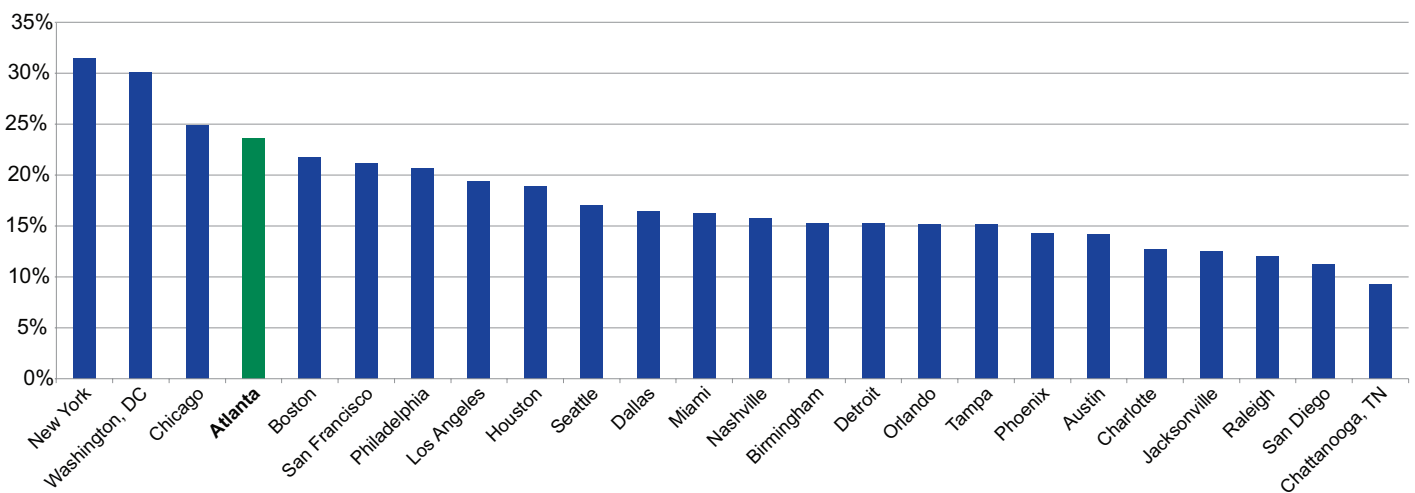
### METRO ATLANTA RESIDENTS SPEND THREE WORK WEEKS EACH YEAR TRAVELING TO WORK

Data from the 2010 American Community Survey show that employed metro Atlanta residents (those who do not work from home) spend, on average, about 126 hours each year traveling (by any means) from home to work. (See Chart 2). Assuming an average work week of 40 hours, this translates into more than three weeks each year spent traveling to work.

Of the selected metros, Atlanta ranks fourth behind New York (144 hours per year), Washington, DC (141) and Chicago (128) in the number of hours spent traveling to work each year.

Similarly, Chart 3 shows that 24 percent of commuters in metro Atlanta have at least a 45 minute commute to work, which, again, ranks fourth among the selected metros.

Chart 3 – Percent of Commuters with 45+ Minute Commute To Work (Selected Metro Areas)



Source: 2010 American Community Survey

## METRO ATLANTA HAS SEVEN OF NATION'S WORST BOTTLENECKS

The American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) and the Federal Highway Administration rank the 250 most congested interchanges in the nation, using freight GPS information to track speeds, which is a main factor used in developing these rankings. In all, of the top 250 “freight significant” bottlenecks, seven were in metro Atlanta.

Table 2 shows the ranked bottlenecks in just the Southeast (those in the top 150), with their overall rank (out of 250) to the left. As can be seen, metro Atlanta has the two highest ranked bottlenecks in the Southeast, and five out of the top 10. Overall, the I-285 and I-85 North interchange is the ninth most congested bottleneck in the nation, according to ATRI.

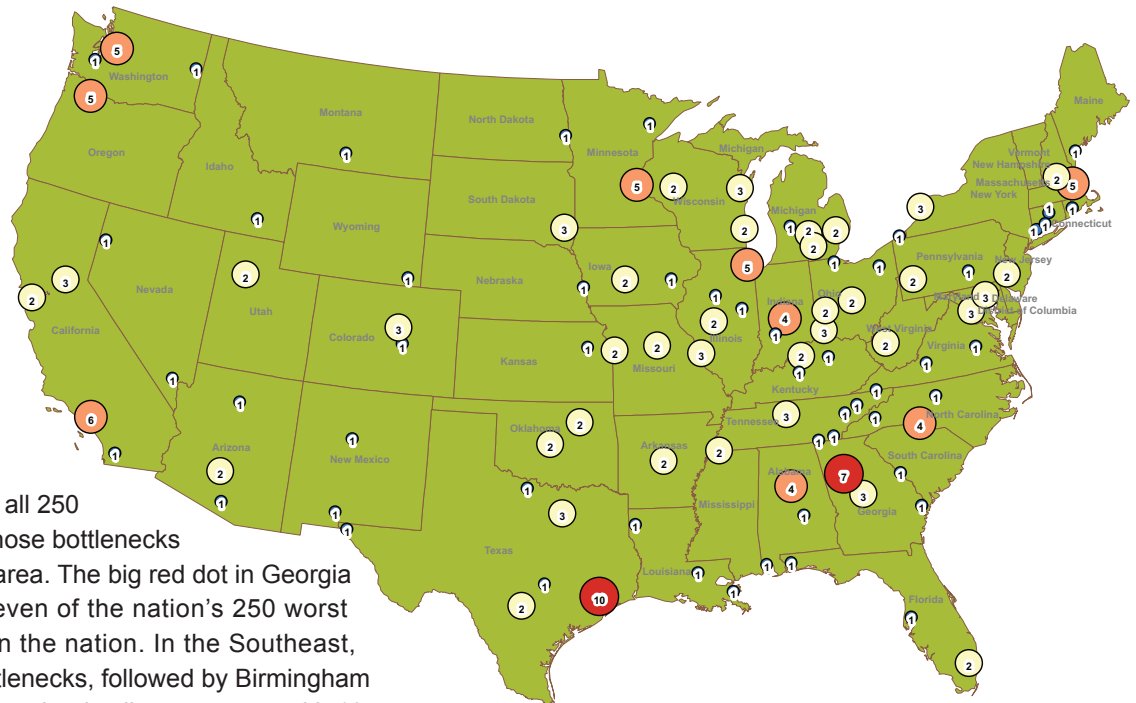
**Table 2 – “Freight Significant” Bottleneck Locations in the Southeast**

| Congestion Ranking | State | Metro Area      | Interchange           | Congestion Ranking | State | Metro Area       | Interchange           |
|--------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 9                  | GA    | Atlanta, GA     | I-285 at I-85 (North) | 99                 | AL    | Montgomery, AL   | I-85 at I-65          |
| 20                 | GA    | Atlanta, GA     | I-75 at I-285 (North) | 102                | GA    | Atlanta, GA      | I-75 at I-85          |
| 27                 | TN    | Nashville, TN   | I-24 at I-440 (North) | 105                | GA    | Atlanta, GA      | I-75 at I-675         |
| 31                 | LA    | Baton Rouge, LA | I-10 at I-110         | 106                | FL    | Jacksonville, FL | I-10 at I-95          |
| 34                 | TN    | Nashville, TN   | I-40 at I-65 (East)   | 117                | TN    | Chattanooga, TN  | I-75 at I-24          |
| 42                 | GA    | Atlanta, GA     | I-20 at I-285 (West)  | 124                | AL    | Birmingham, AL   | I-65 at I-459         |
| 58                 | GA    | Atlanta, GA     | I-20 at I-285 (East)  | 126                | NC    | Charlotte, NC    | I-77 at I-485 (South) |
| 67                 | AL    | Birmingham, AL  | I-65 at I-20          | 130                | NC    | Charlotte, NC    | I-77 near Lake Norman |
| 79                 | GA    | Atlanta, GA     | I-20 at I-75/I-85     | 133                | SC    | Columbia, SC     | I-26 at I-126         |
| 81                 | TN    | Nashville, TN   | I-65 at I-24          | 135                | LA    | New Orleans, LA  | I-10 at I-610 (West)  |
| 82                 | TN    | Memphis, TN     | I-40 at I-240 (East)  | 137                | FL    | Miami, FL        | I-95 at I-195         |
| 83                 | SC    | Charleston, SC  | I-26 at I-526         | 144                | TN    | Memphis, TN      | I-55 at I-240         |
| 93                 | FL    | Tampa, FL       | I-4 at I-275          | 145                | LA    | Shreveport, LA   | I-49 at I-20          |

**Map 1 – Number of Most Congested “Freight Significant” Bottlenecks (out of 250) In Nation**

### Bottlenecks Interchanges

- 1
- 1-2
- 2-4
- 4-7
- 7-10



Map 1 shows ATRI’s ranking of all 250 bottlenecks by the number of those bottlenecks occurring in each major metro area. The big red dot in Georgia is metro Atlanta, which has seven of the nation’s 250 worst bottlenecks, second-highest in the nation. In the Southeast, metro Atlanta has the most bottlenecks, followed by Birmingham and Charlotte. Nationally, Houston leads all metro areas with 10 of the most congested bottlenecks.

For more information on these issues or to suggest new subjects, please email [mcarnathan@atlantaregional.com](mailto:mcarnathan@atlantaregional.com).

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