

REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

July 2010

Congestion in Metro Atlanta

Few things are talked about more in the Atlanta region than traffic congestion. The Georgia General Assembly just passed new legislation – the Transportation Investment Act of 2010 – that will give the voters a chance to add a penny sales tax to pay for transportation improvements, all in an effort to bring congestion relief to metro Atlanta and the entire state.

This *Regional Snapshot* looks at national and regional measures of congestion to show that while traffic congestion is a problem in metro Atlanta, it could be worse. It also shows where congestion is concentrated in the region.

ATLANTA RANKS 11th IN OVERALL CONGESTION

INRIX, a provider of traffic and navigation information, develops a National Traffic Scorecard each year that is based on real-time traffic movement. They collect travel routes and times from billions of GPS reports from vehicles, including taxis, airport shuttles, long-haul trucks and consumer vehicles. Visit their website here – scorecard.inrix.com – to see how they calculate their rankings.

According to the latest scorecard, the national economic slowdown has produced at least one positive result – a significant reduction in traffic congestion nationwide and in metro Atlanta. Table 1 shows both the overall congestion ranks for 2009, and a measure called the Travel Time Tax, developed by INRIX, that shows how congestion has

decreased over the last four years. The Travel Time Tax is the percentage of extra time spent in traffic due to congestion. For example, a Travel Time Tax of 10 percent means that a trip takes 10 percent longer in congested hours (6-10 a.m. and 3-7 p.m., Monday through Friday) than during free-flow hours.

As Table 1 shows, Atlanta ranks 11th among the top 100 metro areas in overall congestion in 2009, and had a Travel Time Tax of 10.6 percent, which is significantly lower than the 18.7 percent recorded in 2006. The overall congestion measure quantifies total congestion in a region, thus larger regions with more people and roads will tend to have more total congestion. The Travel Time Tax essentially controls for size, thus allowing for better comparisons across metro areas.

Table 1. Congestion Rankings For Top 20 Metros

	Overall Congestion Rank	Travel Time Tax (TTT)				2006 - 2009	
	2009	2009	2008	2007	2006	Percentage Point Change in TTT	Percent Change in Employment
Top 100 Metro Average		8.9%	8.8%	13.3%	11.1%	-2.2%	-3.5%
Top 20 Markets							
Los Angeles	1	34.7%	32.5%	44.9%	43.7%	-9.0%	-7.3%
New York	2	19.7%	19.5%	29.1%	20.6%	-0.9%	-1.8%
Chicago	3	16.4%	18.4%	23.0%	20.5%	-4.1%	-5.1%
Washington DC	4	22.4%	20.3%	28.0%	22.2%	0.2%	-0.6%
Dallas	5	11.6%	11.6%	15.2%	11.4%	0.2%	0.2%
Houston	6	13.1%	15.6%	17.7%	14.1%	-1.0%	3.6%
San Francisco	7	21.5%	22.9%	31.4%	29.6%	-8.1%	-5.0%
Boston	8	12.4%	13.2%	18.2%	13.3%	-0.9%	-1.7%
Seattle	9	18.5%	20.2%	28.7%	29.0%	-10.5%	-1.1%
Philadelphia	10	10.3%	10.0%	14.4%	11.9%	-1.6%	-3.1%
Atlanta	11	10.6%	10.1%	18.0%	18.7%	-8.1%	-4.7%
Minneapolis	12	11.8%	13.3%	17.0%	12.1%	-0.3%	-4.8%
Miami	13	13.2%	13.1%	20.6%	21.7%	-8.5%	-8.0%
Phoenix	14	6.8%	8.2%	12.0%	10.4%	-3.6%	-8.7%
Denver	15	9.3%	8.8%	11.0%	10.2%	-0.9%	-1.4%
Baltimore	16	10.4%	9.3%	13.8%	9.5%	0.9%	-2.7%
San Diego	17	10.7%	13.3%	24.3%	20.7%	-10.0%	-5.5%
Riverside	18	8.8%	8.7%	20.5%	20.0%	-11.2%	-10.7%
San Jose	19	14.2%	15.6%	21.9%	20.8%	-6.6%	-4.0%
Sacramento	20	7.4%	6.8%	10.5%	10.6%	-3.2%	-7.3%

Source: INRIX

Congestion in Metro Atlanta

Finally, Table 1 also shows change in employment between 2006 and 2009 and finds, in general, that the areas with the biggest declines in employment also experienced the biggest declines in congestion, although this isn't always true. Seattle, for example, had a relatively small employment decline between 2006 and 2009, but one of the larger declines in the Travel Time Tax. The converse is true for Phoenix.

INRIX's National Traffic Scorecard is only one effort at quantifying traffic congestion. Another widely cited one is the Urban Mobility Report from the Texas Transportation Institute. The data are not directly comparable to INRIX's scorecard because of different methodologies and different timeframes – the most recent data in the Urban Mobility Report is from 2007. Go here - <http://mobility.tamu.edu/ums/> to see how Atlanta ranks in that study.

I-75 SOUTHBOUND AT I-85 WORST BOTTLENECK

Table 2 shows INRIX's ranking of the 10 worst bottlenecks on limited access highways (freeways) in metro Atlanta and shows that I-75 at the I-85 exit (northern tip of downtown connector) ranks the worst. In fact, the southbound stretch of the connector between exits 248 and 251 contributes six of the 10 worst bottlenecks in the region.

CONGESTION MEASURES SHOW CONGESTION CONCENTRATED WHERE JOBS ARE

Shifting from a national to a regional perspective, ARC identifies congested facilities within the 18-county area. ARC uses three measures to rank facilities in terms of congestion:

- » Intensity –How much delay the average commuter experiences each day
- » Duration –How many hours during the day a particular facility is congested

Table 2 – Worst Bottlenecks in Metro Atlanta

Regional Rank	Road/ Direction	Segment/ Interchange	Average Speed when Congested(1)
1	I-75 SB	I-85 - Exit 251	15.6
2	I-85 SB	10th St - Exit 250	16.8
3	I-285 EB	US-23/Buford HWY - Exit 32	16.2
4	I-85 SB	GA-400 - Exit 87	20.3
5	I-85 SB	US-78/US278/US29 - Exit 249	18.3
6	I-85 SB	Williams St - Exit 249A	19.1
7	I-85 SB	Edgewood Ave - Exit 248	21.9
8	I-285 SB	I-85 - Exit 33	18.5
9	I-75 SB	I-675 - Exit 227	18.8
10	I-85 SB	Spring St - Exit 249	20.0

(1). Here, congestion refers to those hours when average speed is half or less than its uncongested speed.

Source: INRIX

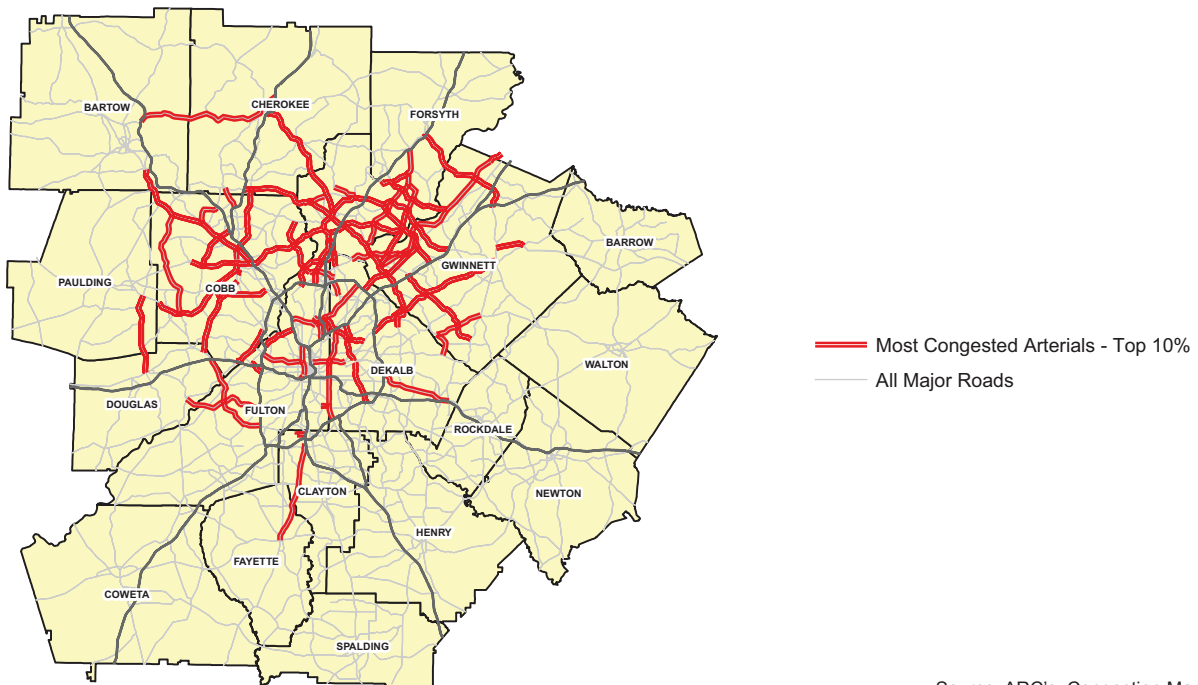
» Extent –Number of people each day impacted by congestion.

Table 3, on the back page, shows the top three most congested facilities (not interstates) for each of the 18 counties and the City of Atlanta. To qualify, the particular road segment must have at least 50 percent of its length within a jurisdiction.

Maps 1 (Top 10 percent) and 2 (top 25 percent) show the most congested major roadways in the region. While congestion is present throughout the region, it is concentrated in areas with highest employment density.

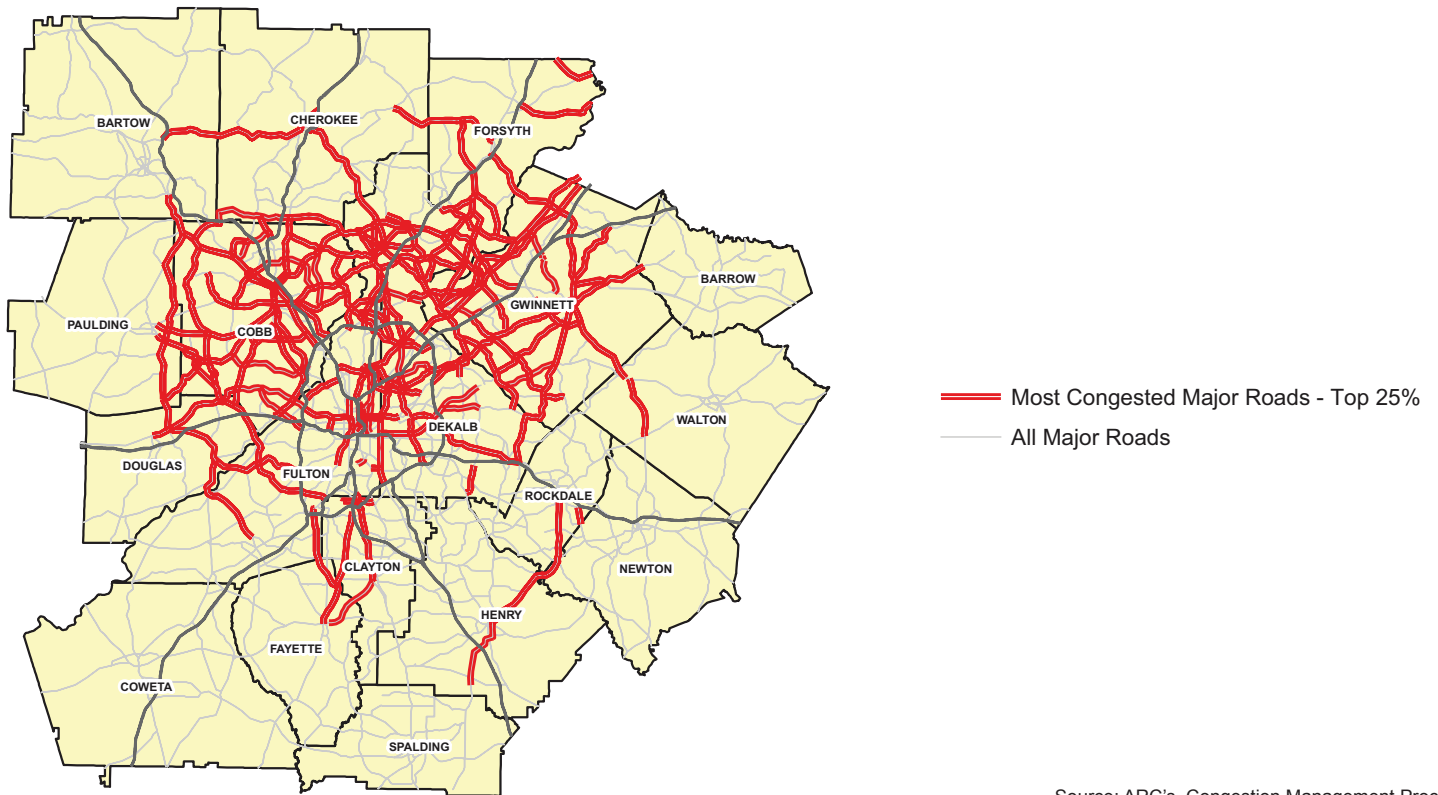
Map 3 shows congested interstate segments. The Downtown Connector (I-75/I-85), State Route 400, I-75 North and I-85 North experience the highest levels of congestion of all the freeways in the region.

Map 1 – Most Congested Facilities: Major Roads – Top 10 Percent

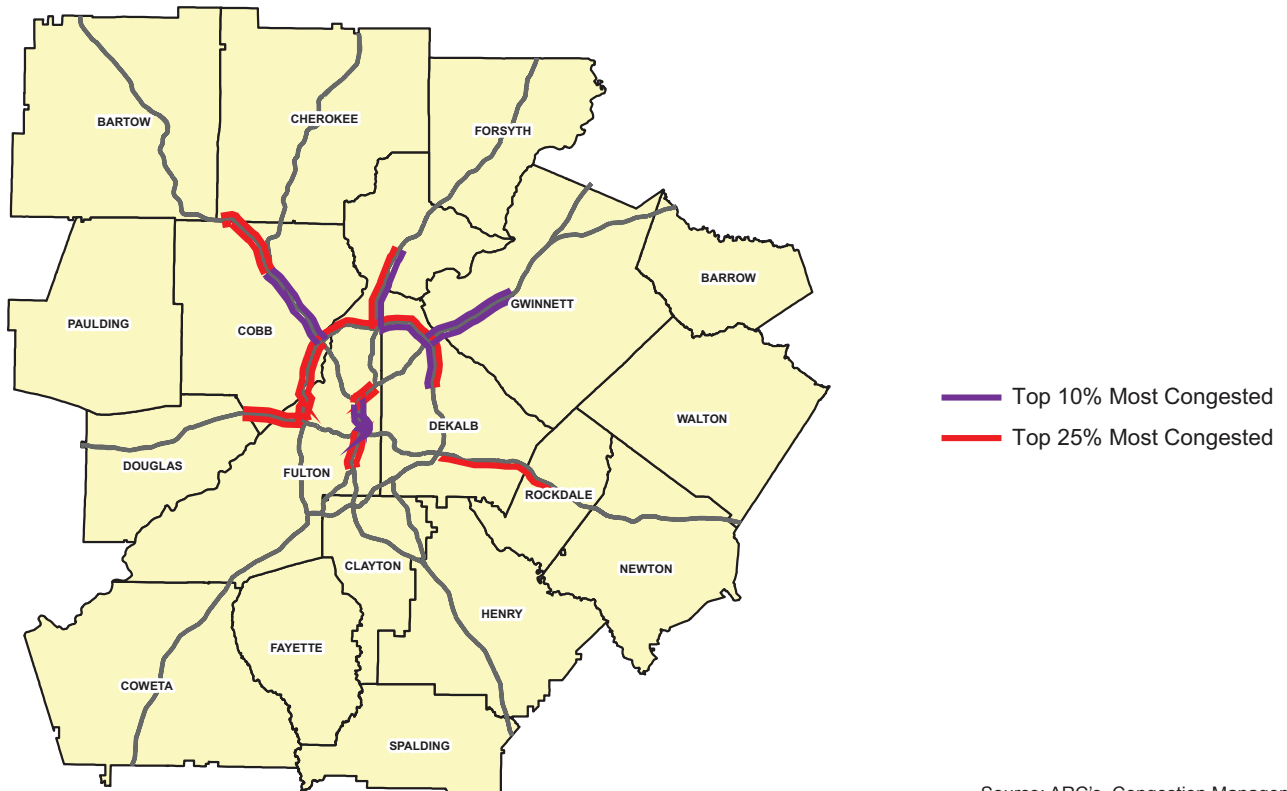


Source: ARC's Congestion Management Process

Map 2 – Most Congested Facilities: Major Roads – Top 25 Percent



Map 3 – Most Congested Freeways



Congestion in Metro Atlanta

Table 3 – Congested Facilities

	Most Congested			2nd Most Congested			3rd Most Congested		
	Segment	From	To	Segment	From	To	Segment	From	To
Barrow	GA 11 - North Broad St. - NB	GA 8 - East-West May St.	GA 53 - Gainesville Hwy./GA 11/ GA 211 - Winder-Jefferson Hwy. Split	GA 11 - North Broad St. - SB	GA 53 - Gainesville Hwy./GA 11/ GA 211 - Winder-Jefferson Hwy. Merge	GA 8 - East-West May St.	GA 211 - Old Winder Hwy./ Farm Market Rd./Thompson Mill Rd. - SB	GA 347 - Thompson Mill Rd. (Gwinnett County)	GA 11 - North Broad St.
Bartow	Old Alabama Rd. - EB	GA 61 - Dallas Hwy.	GA 293 - S. Tennessee St.	GA 61 - North Tennessee St. - SB	US 41/GA 3 - Joe Harris Pkwy.	GA 113 - West Main St.	Old Alabama Rd. - WB	GA 293 - S. Tennessee St.	GA 61 - Dallas Hwy.
Cherokee	GA 140 - Hickory Flat Hwy./Arnold Mill Rd. - NB	Mansell Rd. (Fulton County)	I-575	GA 92 - Crossville Rd./ East Alabama Rd. - WB	GA 9 (Fulton County)	I-575	GA 140 - Hickory Flat Hwy./ Arnold Mill Rd. - SB	I-575	Mansell Rd. (Fulton County)
City of Atlanta	US 23/GA 42 - Moreland Ave. - SB	US 29/US 78/ US 278/GA 8 - Ponce De Leon Ave.	I-20	US 23/GA 42 - Moreland Ave. - NB	I-20	US 29/US 78/ US 278/GA 8 - Ponce De Leon Ave.	GA 139 - Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. - SB	GA 70 - Fulton Industrial Blvd. (Fulton County)	I-285
Clayton	GA 85 - SB	I-75	GA 54 - Lanier Ave. (Fayette County)	GA 85 - NB	GA 54 - Lanier Ave. (Fayette County)	I-75	US 19/US 41/GA 3 - Old Dixie Rd. - NB	I-75 (Riverdale)	I-75 (Hartsfield-Jackson Airport)
Cobb	GA 120 - Whitlock Ave./Dallas Hwy. - WB	GA 120 Loop - Marietta Pkwy	Due West Rd.	GA 120 - Whitlock Ave./ Dallas Hwy. - EB	Due West Rd.	GA 120 Loop - Marietta Pkwy	GA 5 Connector - Ernest Barrett Pkwy. - SB	I-75	GA 120 - Whitlock Ave./Dallas Hwy.
Coweta	GA 154 - Sharpsburg McCollum Rd. - SB	US 29/GA 14/ GA 154	GA 54 (Fayette County)	GA 154 - Sharpsburg McCollum Rd. - NB	GA 54 (Fayette County)	US 29/GA 14/ GA 154	US 29/GA 14/GA 154 - SB	GA 154 - Cascade Palmetto Hwy.	GA 16 - Temple Ave./Clark St.
DeKalb	East Roxboro Rd./ North Druid Hills Rd. - EB	GA 141 - Peachtree Rd.	US 29/GA 8 - Lawrenceville Hwy.	East Roxboro Rd./North Druid Hills Rd. - WB	US 29/GA 8 - Lawrenceville Hwy.	GA 141 - Peachtree Rd.	US 23/GA 155 - Clairmont Rd. - SB	Briarcliff Rd.	E. Ponce De Leon Ave.
Douglas	US 78/GA 5/GA 8 - Bankhead Hwy./ Veterans Memorial Hwy. - WB	GA 5 - Austell Rd. (Cobb County)	Bright Star Rd.	US 78/GA 5/GA 8 - Bankhead Hwy./ Veterans Memorial Hwy. - EB	Bright Star Rd.	GA 5 - Austell Rd. (Cobb County)	GA 92 - Campbellton Fairburn Rd. - NB	West Campbellton Rd.	US 78/GA 5/GA 8 - Bankhead Hwy./ Veterans Memorial Hwy.
Fayette	GA 54 - East Fayetteville Rd. - WB	US 19/US 41/ GA 3 - Tara Blvd. (Clayton County)	North Jeff Davis Dr.	GA 54 - East Fayetteville Rd. - EB	North Jeff Davis Dr.	US 19/US 41/ GA 3 - Tara Blvd. (Clayton County)	North Jeff Davis Dr. - NB	GA 54 - East Fayetteville Rd.	GA 85
Forsyth	Old Alpharetta Rd. - SB	GA 141 - Peachtree Pkwy.	McGinnis Ferry Rd.	GA 141 - Peachtree Pkwy./Medlock Bridge Rd. - NB	GA 120 - Abbotts Bridge Rd.	GA 9 - Atlanta Hwy.	Old Alpharetta Rd. - NB	McGinnis Ferry Rd.	GA 141 - Peachtree Pkwy.
Gwinnett	GA 141 - Peachtree Pkwy. - NB	Holcomb Bridge Rd.	GA 120 - Abbotts Bridge Rd. (Fulton County)	GA 20 - Buford Hwy./ Cumming Hwy./Nelson Brogdon Blvd. - NB	I-85	GA 9 - Atlanta Hwy. (Forsyth County)	GA 20 - Buford Hwy./Cumming Hwy./Nelson Brogdon Blvd. - SB	GA 9 - Atlanta Hwy. (Forsyth County)	I-85
Henry	GA 155 - South Zack Hinton Pkwy. - SB	GA 20 - Keys Ferry St.	Luella Rd.	GA 155 - South Zack Hinton Pkwy. - NB	Luella Rd.	GA 20 - Keys Ferry St.	GA 81 - WB	GA 212 (Newton County)	US 23/GA 42 - Atlanta St.
Newton	GA 20 - Conyers Rd./ McDonough Hwy. - NB	GA 81 - Keys Ferry St.	I-20	GA 20 - Conyers Rd./ McDonough Hwy. - SB	I-20	GA 81 - Keys Ferry St.	Crowell Rd. - SB	I-20	Broad St.
North Fulton	GA 140 - Jimmy Carter Blvd./Holcomb Bridge Rd. - NB	I-85 (Gwinnett County)	GA 9/GA 120 - Alpharetta St.	GA 140 - Jimmy Carter Blvd./Holcomb Bridge Rd. - SB	GA 9/GA 120 - Alpharetta St.	I-85 (Gwinnett County)	State Bridge Rd. - NB	GA 141 - Medlock Bridge Rd.	Kimball Bridge Rd.
Paulding	GA 92 - Hiram Douglasville Hwy. - NB	US 78/GA 5/GA 8 - Bankhead Hwy./ Veterans Memorial Hwy. (Douglas County)	US 278/GA 6 - Wendy Bagwell Pkwy./Jimmy Lee Smith Pkwy.	GA 92 - Hiram Douglasville Hwy. - SB	US 278/GA 6 - Wendy Bagwell Pkwy./Jimmy Lee Smith Pkwy.	US 78/GA 5/GA 8 - Bankhead Hwy./ Veterans Memorial Hwy. (Douglas County)	GA 92 - Dallas Acworth Hwy. - NB	US 278/GA 6 - Wendy Bagwell Pkwy./Jimmy Lee Smith Pkwy.	US 41/GA 3 - North Cobb Pkwy. (Cobb County)
Rockdale	GA 162 - Salem Rd. - NB	Old Salem Rd. (Newton County)	Flat Shoals Rd.	GA 162 - Salem Rd. - SB	Flat Shoals Rd.	Old Salem Rd. (Newton County)	GA 212 - Scott Hwy./Browns Mill Rd. NB	GA 20 - McDonough Hwy. (Newton County)	GA 155 - Snapfinger Rd. (DeKalb County)
South Fulton	GA 6 - Camp Creek Pkwy. - NB	I-285	I-20 (Douglas County)	GA 154/GA 166 - Campbellton Rd. - WB	Barge Rd./End of Lakewood Fwy.	GA 92 - Fairburn Rd. (Douglas County)	GA 6 - Camp Creek Pkwy. - SB	I-20 (Douglas County)	I-285
Spalding	GA 155 - SB	Luella Rd. (Henry County)	East McIntosh Rd./Jackson Rd.	GA 155 - Jackson Rd. - NB	North Hill St. (GA 155)	East McIntosh Rd./Jackson Rd.	GA 155 - NB	East McIntosh Rd./Jackson Rd.	Luella Rd. (Henry County)
Walton	GA 81 - Leone Ave. - NB	GA 138	US 78	GA 81 - Leone Ave. - SB	US 78	GA 138	GA 11 - Winder-Monroe Hwy. - NB	GA 10	GA 316/University Pkwy.

Source: ARC's Congestion Management Process

For more information on these issues or to suggest new subjects, please email mcarnathan@atlantaregional.com.

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