

Making a plan, checking it twice

The need to look ahead is more important than ever says growth specialist

Greenville Journal 11/20/09

By Charles Sowell

Staff Writer

There are vast gaps in local governmental plans for growth over the next decade or so that may keep Greenville and the region on the same path that produced boondoggles such as the Southern Connector, say critics.



Ross

The gaps are more the product of political parochialism than lack of effort by those charged with planning, said Catherine Ross, author of "Megaregions" and director of Georgia Tech's Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development.

Ross was in Greenville this week to speak to a gathering of city leaders from the area.

Ross has also served as a policy advisor to the National Academy of Sciences' Transportation Research Board.

Greenville County has a comprehensive plan that is now winding its way toward final approval. The City of Greenville is working on plans, too, as is nearly every political entity in the Upstate.

Each plan is generally focused on impacts on the entity, not the area.

Planning in this manner has served each entity well in the past but may have cost the region as a whole.

Ross said issues such as the narrow portion of Interstate 385 between Simpsonville and Woodruff Road; plans for repaving work that will close I-385 for months that did not take Greenville impacts into consideration; and the Southern Connector's imminent default on \$200 million in private bonds are examples of the adverse effects of narrow planning strategies.

"The problem with that kind of planning

is that you're looking at things from one pinprick on a long arc of interrelated development," Ross said in a telephone interview prior to her arrival in Greenville.

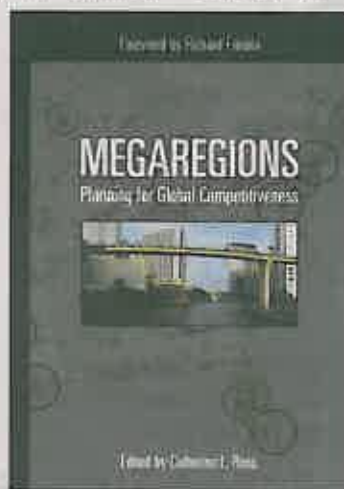
There are seven megaregions in the country, areas with at least 10 million in population. Within a few years there will be 10 megaregions and Greenville is sitting nearly in the center of one of them along the Interstate 85 corridor connecting Raleigh-Durham to Birmingham by way of Atlanta.

Local critics of planning strategies concur with much of what Ross said.

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, said good land use planning is the only way to control traffic issues that seem to grow almost exponentially with each passing year.



Wyche



> Implementing that kind of land use planning is missing in the current Greenville County 10-year master plan, he said.

"It tends to perpetuate sprawl," Wyche said. "And that leads to a host of other problems not the least of which are the adverse effects on the environment and on the public health."

It is expensive, too, Wyche and Ross said. It costs every taxpayer in the nation for things such as new interstate-style highways in the Upstate and the Upstate can't keep up with maintenance on the roads it has now.

Filling the estimated need for roadwork in the regional Greenville-Pickens Area Transportation Study will require between \$700 million and \$1.1 billion over the next 20 years. There will be about \$300 million available according to estimates based on current funding strategies.

Ross said she'd like to see changes in funding strategies that move away from the traditional. One idea she'd like to see considered is allowing and state governments to get a slice of carbon cap and trade monies.

If a county, or area, has cut its carbon footprint through good planning strategies, Ross said they might be able to tap into some of the cap and trade monies and use them to finance further improvements.

"That could become a reinforcing cycle

that benefits everyone," she said.

The Greenville County Economic Development Corporation this week held the last of two public hearings on multimodal transit corridor alternatives.

The study area is limited to a 3.5-mile freight rail corridor owned by GCEDC, but could eventually see a cooperative effort connecting Greenville to Fountain Inn along a high-capacity transit corridor that links all the towns of the Golden Strip and CUICAR.

County Council Chairman H.G. "Butch" Kirven agrees the potential is vast, but wants to proceed with caution.

"The county acquired this stretch of right of way several years ago and we want to make sure we've got the right plan in place before we go shopping for federal grants to do something with it," he said.

With the right planning, Kirven said there was a vast potential for transit-centered development along the old rail line that runs through the ICAR campus.

Add the potential of an electric bus company setting up shop near ICAR and the potential skyrockets, Kirven said.

Contact Charles Sowell at 679-1208 or csowell@greenvillejournal.com.



Kirven