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Public-Private Partnership Forms To Support Passenger Rail

ATLANTA, Jan. 20, 2010 — A statewide group of business and community leaders have established Georgians for Passenger Rail (GPR), an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to support passenger rail throughout Georgia.

The group will support the efforts of Georgia's transportation officials to participate in the proposed intercity rail corridor and encourage local interest in reconnecting Georgia cities in a state rail network. GPR's immediate focus is to produce an economic impact analysis for the proposed first line between Macon and Atlanta.

"Georgia is well-positioned in the Southeast to be a center for passenger rail transportation but we must act quickly or risk losing our competitive position," said John Izard, chairman of GPR. "Our group is working hard to help build the economic case for a passenger line from Macon to Atlanta where there is good existing track infrastructure, support from the communities along the route and federal funding available to support the project."

A viable state network is integral to a regional and national network envisioned by the Obama administration. Until now, Georgia's interest in passenger rail has lacked the economic data to make a strong business case for the state to make a public investment in this area.

The first phase of the effort would be passenger service from Griffin to Atlanta. The group also intends to pursue passenger rail service to Athens and ultimately reconnect other Georgia cities with passenger rail service.

GPR has contracted to develop an economic impact analysis of the Macon-to-Atlanta line and created an advisory group of state transportation officials to ensure the study is focused on the right issues and yields the data needed to support a business case for rail. Representatives from the Georgia DOT, GRTA, the Governor's office and the Andrew Young School of Public Policy at Georgia State University have been closely involved in the scope of the study since its beginning.

In addition to examining construction cost, job creation and value increases related to rail investment, the analysis also aims to identify strategies to underwrite the anticipated operation and maintenance deficit of rail service. Operational funding support is important for federal



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eligibility and to supplement fare revenues generated by riders. The analysis is expected to identify a variety of options that would permit local jurisdictions to choose strategies appropriate to the station impact area.

A professional team of national and local experts is conducting the economic analysis. The team includes the Brookings Institution, HDR Engineering, Robert Charles Lesser & Co. and Bleakley Advisory Group. The study team, in concert with the public agency advisory team, is expected to complete and deliver their report in February.

"Georgians for Passenger Rail is pleased to serve as a catalyst for action by assembling an expert study team and engaging the right public partners to guide the study inquiry," said Izard. "We are confident that when the analysis is complete it will support an investment in rail transportation that is good for transportation, good for economic development and good for Georgia communities.

"We all know it is time for more choices and a new direction for transportation in Georgia, and GPR is grateful for the opportunity to be involved in supporting that effort."

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