

Mr. Chairman, earlier there was an interesting discussion on the floor and an amendment that was offered but subsequently withdrawn by the gentleman from Georgia. I listened carefully to his comments, and I respect his concerns, but I feel that he is absolutely taking the wrong approach, and his region of Atlanta is a good reason why.

The region of Atlanta has been characterized by some as the urban area whose growth has been the most rapid in the history of human settlement. A more than 25 percent increase in population has occurred since 1990. The city's region in that time frame has grown north to south from 65 miles to 110 miles. And, frankly, the results have been devastating.

The average Atlanta commuter drives 36.5 miles a day, the longest work-trip commute in the world. And this has had serious problems in terms of air pollution, to the point that the Federal transportation authorities have withheld resources from the Atlanta metropolitan area due to its inability or unwillingness to meet air quality standards.

This has had business implications. The Hewlett-Packard Company decided not to expand its Atlanta facilities. The city lost its 1997 top rank as the city's best real estate market and is now number 15 among 18 cities that are monitored.

It has health implications. The Centers for Disease Control has found that there is an alarming increase in obesity, and some experts have linked this to the potential of the bad air that discourages exercise, and poor urban design that makes it hard for people to walk, bike and otherwise exercise. Asthma is the number one reason for childhood hospitalization in Atlanta.

The clean air policy conformity provisions were designed to ensure that areas with air quality problems take into account the pollution impacts of proposed transportation projects. The Clean Air Act states that no transportation activity can be funded unless that activity conforms to the State's clean air plan. The State of Georgia, the Regional Atlanta Commission, and the U.S. DOT were finally sued by a coalition of environment and civic groups because of the inability to comply with the law.

Last March, the Federal Court of Appeals ruled that the EPA regulations violated the Clean Air Act and the EPA and the U.S. DOT were forced to revise their guidelines surrounding grandfathering. Now we have had the Federal Government and the environmental groups agree that the current policy is in fact appropriate, but because the State was able to turn

things around so quickly, not a single dollar of Federal funding was lost in the process.

During the conformity lapse, money was redirected from polluting projects to projects already in the plan that either had no negative impact, like bridge reconstruction and safety improvements, or showed air quality benefits, such as transit and high occupant vehicle lanes. The proposed amendment that was discussed would have undermined the conformity provisions and make it easier for regions to ignore air quality in their transportation plans, speeding the march towards gridlock and away from clean air.

But Georgia has been making progress under the current program. The coalition of citizens, business, homebuyers, and environmental groups have formed a coalition to address the air quality and traffic congestion concerns. Governor Barnes, with the support of the business community, created the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority to coordinate and oversee for the first time metropolitan Atlanta's fight against pollution, traffic and unplanned growth.

There is an exciting 130-acre redevelopment in the old Atlanta Steel site that is combining residential, retail office and entertainment space in a transit-oriented development on a brownfield site in midtown Atlanta.

Mr. Chairman, I am a cosponsor of legislation introduced by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. Lewis), The Road Back to Clean Air Act, which would put into law the EPA and DOT conformity and transportation planning guidelines that were key to addressing the air quality problems in Atlanta, Georgia. The bill would increase the flexibility so other areas of the country could continue to receive Federal funds for transit, safety improvements, road rehabilitation, and other projects, even during a lapse in the conformity of their transportation plans.

It is decidedly misdirected for us to retreat from our commitment to clean air and to try and use this legislation to do so. We would be far better served to try and make the system work, and in Atlanta it is working and is a model for the country.