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MIND THE GAP: UNDERLYING ISSUES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE MARTA SYSTEM AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF INTERSTATE-85

Megan Craig

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In surveys of cities with the worst traffic congestion, Atlanta is nearly always ranked within the top 10. Despite daily standstill traffic, there have been few attempts to improve and expand the Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) system to alleviate the crowded roads. At its inception in the early 1970s, deep-seated racism within the metropolitan counties prevented MARTA from expanding into suburban Atlanta. Even though there have been large demographic shifts in these counties, MARTA has not expanded to meet the demands of the growing population. The lack of public transportation is especially detrimental to lower-income populations, many of whom do not have access to private transportation. On March 31st, a 180-foot section of Interstate-85, a crucial avenue into the city, collapsed, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to find alternate commutes. Although the inadequate MARTA system originated from racism, the collapse of I-85 spurred MARTA advocacy groups and incited public support for the expansion of public transit.

The conclusions drawn in this paper are from analysis of historical documents, case studies, and articles. I begin by exploring the circumstances surrounding the creation of MARTA that prevented it from expansion into the metro area. Then, I examine the negative effects that lack of effective public transportation has on impoverished communities. Finally, I analyze the increasing popularity of groups that support MARTA expansion after the collapse of I-85 occurred.

The population of Atlanta is predicted to continue increasing for the foreseeable future. Due to the sprawling nature of the city, more and more people will settle in metro counties and commute to the city, adding thousands of cars to the road. To remain competitive as a desirable place to live, it is crucial that Atlanta expand their public transportation system and increase accessibility to those living outside the city.