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**THE FINAL REPORT OF THE  
SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL TRANSIT SOLUTIONS  
SENATE RESOLUTION 1085**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The Honorable Steve Gooch, Chairman  
Senator, District 51

The Honorable Brandon Beach, Committee Member  
Senator, District 21

The Honorable P.K. Martin, Committee Member  
Senator, District 9

The Honorable Fran Millar, Committee Member  
Senator, District 40

The Honorable Nan Orrock, Committee Member  
Senator, District 36

The Honorable Valencia Seay, Committee Member  
Senator, District 34

The Honorable Lindsey Tippins, Committee Member  
Senator, District 37

**Prepared by the Senate Research Office  
2016**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Senate Study Committee on Regional Transit Solutions was created pursuant to the authorization provided by Senate Resolution 1085.<sup>1</sup>

### **This Committee was formed to:**

- Determine what role a region-wide transit system should play in mitigating congestion;
- Evaluate and propose regional transit solutions that will advance the metropolitan Atlanta region into the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
- Consider whether fundamental reforms and branding are necessary to ensure the establishment of a comprehensive region-wide system which will service the growing needs of the metropolitan Atlanta region;
- Decide whether the creation of new regional transit governance and funding model is an option that should be investigated; and
- Determine whether one comprehensive regional transit plan will be more beneficial to the state than a county-by-county or city-by-city approach.

### **The Following Members Served on the Regional Transit Solutions Committee:**

- Senator Steve Gooch of the 51<sup>st</sup>, Chairman;
- Senator Brandon Beach of the 21<sup>st</sup>;
- Senator P.K. Martin of the 9<sup>th</sup>;
- Senator Fran Millar of the 40<sup>th</sup>;
- Senator Nan Orrock of the 36<sup>th</sup>;
- Senator Valencia Seay of the 34<sup>th</sup>; and
- Senator Lindsey Tippins of the 37<sup>th</sup>.

### **The Committee Convened Three Times at the Georgia State Capitol:**

- *Thursday September 1, 2016 – 426 CLOB, Atlanta, GA 30334 (Joint meeting with the House)*
  - Perimeter Community Improvement Districts (PCIDs) – Tammy Thompson, External Affairs Director
  - GRTA/SRTA – Christopher Tomlinson, Executive Director
  - UBER, Nick Juliano, Public Affairs Manager for the Southeast
- *Wednesday October 5, 2016 – 450 Capitol, Atlanta, GA 30334*
  - Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Act (MARTA) – Keith T. Parker – CEO
  - Georgia Transit Association (GTA) Robert Hiatt – Division Director
  - Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) – Scott Haggard – Manager of Government Affairs
- *Monday December 12, 2016 – 450 Capitol, Atlanta, GA 30334*
  - Cobb County Transit (CCT) – Vida Covington, General Manager
  - Gwinnett County Transit (GCT) – Alan Chapman, Director of Transportation

## **II. BACKGROUND**

What is transit? Transit is the act of moving people or things from one place to another<sup>2</sup>; the activity or process of moving someone or something from one place to another<sup>3</sup>; a facility consisting of the means and equipment necessary for the movement of passengers or goods<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see SR 1085 in Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Merriam-Webster's Dictionary

<sup>3</sup> Source: MacMillan Dictionary

<sup>4</sup> Source: Vocabulary.com

In 2015, Atlanta was ranked No. 9 on the Top 10 list of U.S. cities with the worst traffic. Drivers in Atlanta wasted an average of 59 hours in gridlock in 2015, according to the transportation analytics company "INRIX Inc." According to the AJC, slightly more than a quarter of people polled in a recent survey of the 13-county area said transportation was the biggest problem facing the metro Atlanta region. We have to find a transportation that aims to end traffic congestion as a regular part of life in metropolitan Atlanta and to dramatically increase the mobility of its residents.

According to the Atlanta Regional Commission, The Atlanta region is served by many different transit agencies providing various types of transit services. These services range from fixed route services like heavy rail, bus systems and university shuttles, to on-demand services, paratransit and vanpools. Some of the services are integrated regionally, while others are available only on a local level. Georgia has more counties than all but one other state (Texas). Metro Atlanta is composed of 28 counties, which poses great challenges in that so many jurisdictions must agree and work together on a collective solution.

**There have been many opinions to the transit solutions.**

- 1) Impose a 1% MARTA sales taxes in all 28 metro areas
- 2) Secure state support for MARTA
- 3) Secure federal funding
- 4) Expand MARTA trains and busses into all metro Atlanta counties. Multiple new train lines and improved bus schedules.
- 5) Create bus-only lanes on all interstate highways.

Atlanta is the only state capital in the United States that doesn't receive state funding for public transit. This study committee will examine if metro Atlanta's current system of multiple transit providers is inefficient, as well as time-consuming and confusing to the users. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), Georgia spent \$0.63 per person on public transportation in 2008. In comparison, Illinois spent \$40.43 and North Carolina spent \$7.94. Collaboration between governments is needed to establish a truly regional, accessible transit system in Georgia. Georgia's greatest transit challenges are expanding the system to address the growing Atlanta region population and an aging rural population with limited mobility. The biggest hurdles are funding and regional collaboration. The various transit agencies in the Atlanta region will need to collaborate more in terms of service and funding.

**III. MEETING DISCUSSIONS & TESTIMONIES – September 15<sup>th</sup> 2016**

A. Perimeter Community Improvement Districts (PCIDs) – Tammy Thompson, External Affairs Director

- **Transit oriented development as a market trend**
  - With MARTA taking a strong lead, transit oriented developments are the leading projects across metro Atlanta, at the Perimeter Center as well as in town communities such as Avondale Estates, Brookhaven and Edgewood Candler Park. The office development is typically followed or paralleled by retail, and eventually rooftops, all contributing to a broader tax base.
- **Build to suit tenants and Fortune 1000 targeting millennial employees**
  - Though the number of speculation office towers in metro Atlanta still remains in single digits, the build to suit market is currently stronger, as new owners like State Farm, Mercedes USA and others build campuses and employment centers aimed increasingly

at their potential Millennial work force. Millennials are much more supportive of transit, less likely to own a car, and much more likely to seek housing near their place of employment.

- **Improvements to traffic flow and capacity expansions support Economic Development**  
At the Perimeter Center, and elsewhere, we have seen time and again that our infrastructure and transportation investments, including projects such as Georgia's first diverging diamond interchange, the Hammond ramps onto and off of Georgia 400 and the Perimeter Center Parkway bridge – are the catalysts for a multi-fold payback into the region and community. Better traffic flow allows for more commerce and shorter commute times, and better engineered surface streets and major intersections reduce the stress and impact of the major morning and afternoon drive times on commuters.
  - **Development Community Seeking to Build Nodes Around Finite Number of Transit Hubs**
    - As the state considers additional support for mass transit, please take note that private developers are already clustering around the finite number of existing transit hubs. Those site numbers can be expanded, as well as the tax rolls increased, if those nodes were linked, or otherwise better connected, via express bus service, dedicated lanes, light rail or other options for last mile connectivity.
  - **Alternative Transportation – Trails, Bike Paths, Wider Sidewalks all Improve Quality of Life**
    - Municipalities and developers are also witnessing the major quality of life enhancements and benefits of bike lanes and paths, as well as pedestrian trails and wider sidewalks, connecting centers of activity and commerce, as well as linking greenspaces. The PATH trails, PATH 400 from Buckhead, Atlanta Beltline and others are seeing users from all across the region, thousands of whom are hoping for something similar to be constructed in their own neck of the woods.
- B. State Road & Tollway Authority (SRTA)/Greater Regional Transit Authority (GRTA) – Christopher Tomlinson – Executive Director
- **Xpress Transit Service Has a Broad Reach – Connecting to Job Centers in Downtown, Midtown, and Perimeter**
    - 33 Xpress routes are funded and managed by GRTA. There are 166 coaches; 30 park and ride lots in 12 metro counties; draws ridership from 40 counties; there are more than 2 million passengers boarding per year; and they have been in service for 11 years.
    - Xpress upgrades and improved service includes three new routes serving Perimeter Center from Cobb, Gwinnett, and Forsyth Counties; 15 Park-and Rides, that will offer trips at least every 15 minutes; and free Wi-Fi onboard.
    - Xpress Transit is in the process of renovating its fleet. Currently, there are 166 coaches, 95 of which are ten years or older; Renovations will include, overhaul of all major components (engine, transmission, etc.), bus interior/exterior, and fare systems.
  - **Atlanta's Transportation Landscape is Changing**
    - Georgia's Major Mobility Investment Program, which is a \$14 billion program, includes 11 projects that are planned for construction over the next 10-15 years. Nine of those 11 projects are located within the Atlanta Region. This includes four new express lanes.

Xpress Transit and Express Lanes can improve the capacity of Georgia's most congested highways. Less than 2 percent of vehicles during the morning commute are express commuter coaches; however, commuter coaches move 26 percent of the commuters traveling.

- **GRTA & SRTA Integration**

- Addressing the region's transportation issues through true innovation and collaboration between transit and tolling strategies by re-aligning positions and functions to support core businesses; identifying shared cost and revenue opportunities; implementing shared infrastructure opportunities; and addressing how to share talent, planning, and overhead.

- **The Future of Xpress**

- In order to maintain the safety and security of GRTA Xpress customers, it is imperative that the motor coaches be rehabbed in FY 17-FY 21, along with motor replacement in FY 22; Service must be expanded to the airport to serve airport workers, commuters and supply workforce; as well as expand service opportunities along managed lane corridors.

C. **UBER – Nick Juliano – Public Affairs Manager for the Southeast**

- **What Does a Rideshare Company Have To Do With Mass Transit?**

- Rideshare provides first mile/last mile connectivity beyond existing stations and routes; people are using rideshares as a supplement, not substitute to public transit; ridesharing can extend the effective range of stations by providing affordable, fast transportation to those without cars; ridesharing can reduce traffic congestion on roads feeding to heavy rail stations; and ridesharing can reduce parking challenges at stations without lots. UBER is proud to have a current partnership with MARTA and 13 other transit agencies nationwide.

- **UBER and MARTA**

- During a 2016 eight month study, it was determined that UBER rides to and from the MARTA stations has almost tripled since 2015. This increase is largely due to the partnership between UBER and MARTA. You can now request a UBER to complete your journey by using the MARTA on the Go App.
- UBER anticipates further growth. Being that rideshare and mass transit are both important services that are sought by businesses, young professionals, and historically underserved communities.
- The data suggests that regular MARTA riders are using UBER to get them to the stations; and regular UBER riders, are adding MARTA to their routes to substantially reduce cost over distance.
- MARTA and UBER have found creative and innovative ways of marketing their partnership. There is a \$20.00 new user promo on the MARTA app; you can link with UBER through the MARTA app; UBER has advertised the partnership on MARTA buses and trains.

**MEETING DISCUSSIONS & TESTIMONIES – October 5<sup>th</sup> 2016**

A. **MARTA – Keith Parker (CEO) and Robert L. Ashe (Board Chairman)**

- **Current Forecast of MARTA**
  - Prior to Keith Parker becoming the CEO, MARTA was projected to lose \$25 - \$30 million per year. In six months after Mr. Parker started (2012-2013), MARTA saw a \$9 million surplus. MARTA's debt is unique, in that it is taken from the Capitol Budget. MARTA plans to leverage expansion by going after federal dollars. MARTA needs a long funding period to prove the success of the system
  
- **The "Ride with Respect" Campaign**
  - This campaign has been successful with a major focus on safety. In two years, 8000 people have been suspended from transit service, and of those, less than five percent are repeat offenders. MARTA has less crime reported than both Houston and Dallas; where Atlanta has twice as many people. To date, there have been no reported civil rights or racial complaints. MARTA is installing security cameras everywhere. Their motto for the campaign is "the dumbest thing to do is commit a crime on MARTA." Customer's main complaint with MARTA is they want MARTA to be expanded, and run more frequently
  
- **MARTA'S Upcoming Plans**
  - Intentions are to replace all old rail fleet cars and purchase updated new cars with new technology and potentially a whole new look. Currently, although the cars are old, MARTA insists the cars are safe. The new cars will definitely be safe and historically MARTA has invested in safety and safe practices
  - Updating their Breeze Card App. Intends on making the breeze card media based. MARTA will coordinate with local venues, events, etc. to make transportation and using MARTA more convenient. Currently, working with Georgia Tech's President, Bud Peterson to include Breeze pass with basketball tickets. Also, working towards barcodes on concert tickets and or other events to also include transportation to event
  - Consolidating regional transits to also use the Breeze card
  - Implementing Wi-Fi and Cellular service on trains
  - Installing "smart" restrooms which are proven to be more vandal proof and can provide additional assistance to those who need it
  - Executing new MARTA web-site that will be up and running before the beginning of 2017
  - MARTA would like to focus on polishing and perfecting the current system and jurisdictions before expanding to other areas

B. Georgia Transit Association (GTA) – Robert Hiatt – President

- **State Level Transit Governance**
  - GTA supports a state transit governance model that enhances access to public and human services transit, preserves local control, and coordinates existing transit programs to eliminate the duplication of services.
  - There are multiple agencies that are responsible for delivering transit services. Improved state governance is a critical first step to optimize local, multi-county, and multi-regional transit services.
  
- **Georgia Transit Funding**
  - Georgia provides a small amount of state funding for capital projects; however, it provides no operating funds for local transit programs.

- According to the National Transit database, the economic activity, as of 2014, generated by Georgia's public and human services transit program was approximately \$4.3 billion dollars. Georgia must contribute a significant level of funding, primarily in operations, to increase transit competitiveness. Current Georgia's operation transit is funded 50 percent by federal funds and 50 percent by local funds. Capital is funded 80 percent by federal funds; ten percent by state funds and ten percent by local funds<sup>5</sup>
- Transit cannot exist without local government funding and support. In large urban areas where the population is 200,000 or more, they must fund 100 percent of the operational costs
- MARTA remains the largest heavy rail transit system in the country that does not receive state financial support. Georgia is the largest state (by population) that offers no dedicated funding for transit
- While the state does financially support the State's Xpress Bus service provided by GRTA/SRTA through annual appropriations, it does not provide annual financial support to any other local or regional transit provider, In 2015, the state legislature approved a one-time allocation of \$75 million in bonds to be spent on transit capital needs around the state

C. Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) – Scott Haggard – Manager of Governmental Affairs

- **Demographics Support Transit**

- Americans under 30 are 2.3 times more likely to ride public transit than Americans age 30-60<sup>6</sup>
- Older Adults want amenities close to their home. Access to transportation, food, green space, and a pharmacy or drug store is at the top of their list<sup>7</sup>
- Forty-four percent of those asked believe that expanding public transit is the best long-term solution to the regions traffic problem. Ninety-one percent of those surveyed said improving public transit is very important or somewhat important to metro Atlanta's future<sup>8</sup>

- **Major Issues Facing Transit**

- Availability of funding and coordination to cover the needs
- Restriction on the use of state motor fuel tax funds for transit
- Coordination of public services between transit systems in the metro regions
- Changes need to be made to the governance structures
- Preserving local decision-making and empowering local funding innovation

**MEETING DISCUSSIONS & TESTIMONIES – December 12<sup>th</sup> 2016**

A. CCT – Vida Covington – General Manager

- **Service Description**

- Fixed route bus service on 14 local and express routes

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<sup>5</sup> According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (2016). <http://www.transportation.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Source: Who's on Board 2014 Mobility Survey, 11,842 respondents in 46 U.S. regions

<sup>7</sup> Source: AARP

<sup>8</sup> Source: Survey conducted by Kennesaw State University; 5200 residents in 13 counties, with results significant down to the county-level.



- Operational agreement with SRTA/GRTA
- Fleet Size 114 buses, 30 paratransit vehicles
- FY15 ridership was 3.3 Million
- **Governance**
  - Governed by the Cobb County Board of Commissioners
  - Administrative and management functions provided by Cobb DOT/Transit Division
  - Contractor responsible for the system's operations, maintenance, and customer service function
  - Transit Systems Advisory Board
- **Funding Model**
  - A combination of federal, state, and local funds
  - \$20 Million for FY17; 22 Million proposed for F 18
  - Revenue sources are County's general fund, Passenger fares, and grants
  - Capital dollars are primarily used for vehicle purchases and preventative maintenance
  - Go! Transit Capital Program

B. GCT – Alan Chapman – Director of Transportation

- **GCT Operations – 2015 thru 2018 Service Enhancements**
  - Restored Saturday service to all local routes
  - Added trips on express route from Indian Trail Road Park and Ride Lot
  - Replaced local fleet and replacing paratransit fleet (28 buses / 7 vans)
  - Implemented new Emory/CDC express service
  - Upgrading Sugarloaf Park and Ride lot
  - Additional local and complementary paratransit service
  - New flex service
  - Overhaul express fleet
  - Promote all available uses of alternate modes
- **Transit Investment Plan – Scope of Work**
  - Conduct extensive public outreach
    - Quantify the public's expectations for GCT
    - Set goals using input from the public and stakeholders
  - Perform existing conditions analysis
    - Identify potential new markets and underserved areas
    - Forecast growth corridors including inter and intra county trips
    - Evaluate existing services with respect to measures of efficiency and effectiveness
- **Transit Investment Plan – Major Deliverables**
  - System wide service improvement recommendations
  - Advanced technology solutions recommendations
  - Short and long range plans for the transit system
    - Short Term – next one to two years; operational improvements
    - Medium Term – two to eight years; the next level of service delivery implementation

- Long Term – Until the year 2040; the development of high capacity dedicated right of way transit solutions
- Feasibility report with an estimated cost to construct and operate for a community-supported major investment
- Financial Plan
  - Dedicated funding sources for transit services
  - Alternative revenue sources

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Transit in Georgia covers a broad spectrum of services which enhance the state's overall transportation network and provides citizens with greater mobility options. Collectively, these transit services provide the taxpayers of Georgia with numerous economic and environmental benefits, and are funded through a variety of local, state, and federal sources. More than 120 public transportation systems currently operate in the state of Georgia – the larger systems in the Atlanta region such as MARTA's comprehensive bus and rail system, GRTA's Xpress commuter coaches, and the Cobb and Gwinnett local and regional bus systems; other major bus systems in cities such as Savannah, Macon, Columbus, Rome, Athens, and Augusta; and more than 100 small bus and van services.

Increasing options and providing flexibility to counties for funding transportation helps ensure that local officials, working with their constituents, have the tools necessary to build and maintain a transportation network necessary to attract economic development and serve the needs of their citizens.

In light of these principles, it is the position of the Committee, that the State of Georgia create in 2017, a comprehensive, far-reaching "Path Forward for Transit," with a set-aside amount of state funding for the purpose of developing an all-inclusive solution in the area of transit governance and funding that can be fully embraced by policymakers and the public, and enacted into law by 2018.

## V. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to move the dialogue forward in a measurable way on the topic of transit governance, below are recommendations based on the testimonies and findings previously provided.

### ***“Governance” must be defined, as it has different meanings in different contexts***

- 1) The term transit covers a wide range of transportation services, and because of this extreme variance in the type of service provided, a similar array of governance models also exists across Georgia. This leads to the first principle of the committee; which is that a single definition of “governance” must be made clear before any additional work can be done to advance solutions on this issue.

### ***Governance and funding must be considered concurrently***

- 2) The committee believes that the state’s network of transit services as previously defined brings significant benefit to the citizens of Georgia, and as such, is at a minimum worthy of consideration for direct and dedicated funding from the State of Georgia. At the same time, it is neither appropriate nor practical to entertain greater State control of transit services without injecting the possibility of State funding into the conversation. If the State believes that transit, in all its forms, is a useful and necessary service to be provided to the public, the way that such transit is governed cannot be separated from the way that it is funded.

### ***Any “governance” solution must be a statewide solution***

- 3) As stated previously, transit is being provided in more than 120 counties across Georgia, carrying more than 150 million riders annually to work, school, medical appointments and shopping opportunities. While the preponderance of these rides do occur in the metro Atlanta region, any potential solutions in the area of governance or funding even in this area will naturally affect transit systems statewide. For example, human services transportation trips that occur in every corner of the state are provided by not only MARTA in the Atlanta area but also by numerous county-run transit systems that may have only a handful of small buses. In another example, potential solutions for funding rail projects in the Atlanta area may also be applicable to the Savannah (Chatham County) area, which has an interest in bringing on line a new rail service in the city’s downtown. Transit does not exist solely within the 3-county MARTA service area, the 13-county GRTA service area, or just the large cities of Georgia. Therefore, solutions must be of a statewide nature.

### ***Any solution must be sustainable for the long term to address projected growth***

- 4) Georgia is now the 8<sup>th</sup>-most populous state in the nation, and is projected to continue growing rapidly in the next half-century. The metro Atlanta region alone is projected to add 2.5 million people by 2040. These figures make the provision of transit services statewide even more significant in the coming years, and because some transit capital projects require fixed infrastructure that must remain in place for many years, it is critical that the State of Georgia “get it right” the first time when governance and funding solutions are developed. The plans and structures implemented today will be in place for several future generations.

***Economic mobility – the ability of workers to access jobs – is a critical component of the transit conversation, in addition to the economic development benefits***

- 5) Georgia has consistently been named the number one state in which to do business in recent years, due to our favorable business and economic climate. Indeed, Governor Deal has made job creation and the pursuit of economic opportunities a cornerstone of his administration. We have seen evidence of the importance of transit in the decision-making processes of major businesses when they are choosing corporate locations – State Farm, Mercedes-Benz, and NCR, to name just a few. Much of this is driven by the desire of business to locate near where their potential employees are, and today’s emerging workforce values proximity to transit. However, equally important in this conversation are the citizens of Georgia in more rural and suburban areas who are entirely unable to access jobs without transit services, or who must endure hours-long transit rides to make it to their workplaces. Leaving these citizens out of the equation does just as much damage to our state economically as failing to recognize the needs of the future millennial workforce.

***Any solution must be approved by a local referendum to bind counties or municipalities***

- 6) Any proposal for regional or state transit solutions, as provided for by this report, shall encompass language that clearly states, that no county or municipality shall be bound to participate in or fund such programs until approved by the voters in a local referendum.

***The process of developing a final solution must be collaborative and include public input***

- 7) Finding solutions to transit questions that have vexed policymakers for decades is not simple, but will affect many. Citizens are passionate about transit in many ways, and quite ready to offer opinions about how it could be “fixed.” This argues against a “top-down” approach from the State that does not take into account local viewpoints and public opinion. A comprehensive, long-term solution that will be in place for years to come must come about only as the result of a public and transparent process in which all voices are heard, diverse ideas are brought to the table, and there is broad political support for the final solution.

***Third party expertise***

- 8) A third party consultant with transportation expertise can assist in the evaluation and proposal of regional transit solutions. This outside party will give specific solutions with timelines and dates. State procurement requirements will be followed.

***Decision Making Process***

- 9) It is important that Senate and House Transportation chairman, along with a representative from all five of the largest counties (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Fulton) are involved in the decision making process regarding transit solutions.

***Improvements to make the Single County T-SPLOST more viable for some counties***

- 10) Remove dates in the law that may make it difficult for counties to conduct a Single County T-SPLOST referendum on the November 7, 2017, election date.

- 11) Allow counties that passed a fractional Single County T-SPLOST for less than 1 percent to hold a second referendum for the remaining balance before the existing tax expires as current law only allows counties to have one T-SPLOST in place at a time. Unforeseen needs or opportunities may require additional transportation revenue before counties are allowed to hold a new T-SPLOST referendum.
- 12) Allow counties to fund state transportation projects as granted in the standard SPLOST law.
- 13) Authorize counties to collect any fractional portion dedicated to transit for a maximum period of 20 years. In order to receive federal funds, transit projects typically need to show a dedicated funding mechanism for a minimum of 20 years.

**VI. SIGNATURE PAGE**

Respectfully Submitted,

**THE SENATE REGIONAL TRANSIT SOLUTIONS STUDY COMMITTEE**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Gooch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

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**Senator Steve Gooch – Chairman  
District 51**