

# The Augusta Chronicle

\$1.25

THE SOUTH'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER — ESTABLISHED 1785

Sunday, February 4, 2007

4A

Sunday, February 4, 2007

## OPINION

**The Augusta Chronicle**

The South's Oldest Newspaper — Est. 1785

WILLIAM S. MORRIS III, PUBLISHER

DONALD W. BAILEY, PRESIDENT

DENNIS SODOMKA, EDITOR | MICHAEL RYAN, EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

WILLIAM S. MORRIS, PUBLISHER 1936-1966

*"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."*  
— Confucius

*And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.*  
— II Samuel 6:5

## Let's get back on track

*Georgians need to get on board the Brain Train*

**E**mory Morsberger has seven daughters. So there are lots of birthdays at his house.

The only problem is getting there.

And Atlanta traffic doesn't help.

Once, the Lilburn redeveloper was sitting in I-85 traffic, late for a daughter's birthday, and thought to himself there has to be a better way to get there from here.

There just may be.

It's called commuter rail.

More specifically, the "Brain Train."

Morsberger has brought together a collection of visionaries and public officials from various local governments to propose that the state build a commuter train from downtown Atlanta to Athens.

They call it the "Brain Train" because it would link some 10 college and university campuses along its 68-mile route.

That alone is an exciting prospect: Morsberger sits on the edge of his chair as he talks about the synergies created by a commuter rail passing by all those colleges. The students going back and forth. The professors able to teach at more than one facility. The increased institutional cooperation and coordination that might result. The increased access to a wider area of students for all the schools.

It's not just Morsberger who's excited, either. Students at several of the schools have formed "Brain Train" clubs to push the project along.

For good reason, too: The thousands of car wrecks along commuter routes every year involve a

lot of students, some of whom die.

On a more positive note, Morsberger says some commuter rail cars in the country feature their own classes and meetings of commuters who see each other every day.

But just as important is the potential of the Brain Train to lighten the load for everyone on Georgia highways. Morsberger's group estimates 10,000 commuters would be riding rails instead of clogging roads.

That's not an inconsequential number, Morsberger notes, considering that Atlanta has the fourth-worst commute in the country, soon to be second-worst.

Commuter rail may sound pie-in-the-sky, but it's not. There are models to follow in Virginia/D.C. and Florida; the Brain Train could run parallel to CSX tracks already in place; and

Morsberger's group says the cost of building it would be one-third that of a new lane of highway: \$5.32 million a mile for rail versus \$18.2 million for highway, in 2005 dollars.

Getting the right-of-way also should be easier along the existing rail line than it would be for a new highway.

The Brain Train's total cost of \$380 million — admittedly several years old now — would likely be an 80-20 federal-state match, Morsberger says.

He and others spoke Thursday before the state House Appropriations Subcommittee on Economic Development, which seemed encouraging. Morsberger is asking for \$10 million for planning and site acquisition for many of the 12 stations to be served by the line. Several existing stations would also be used.

His hope is to begin construction in 2009 and get the trains rolling by 2011.

In one-third the time of building a highway, he says.

Ultimately, commuter rail also could link to Augusta, providing more educational and economic development synergies to cross the state back and forth.

Remember, too, that gridlock in Atlanta is not just an Atlanta problem. It affects any of us who visit the capital city — and it may be warding off businesses that don't want to subject their employees to road rage on the way to work.

Georgians are all in this together.

Transportation should be a top priority in the Statehouse. When it comes to commuter rail, we're behind the curve.

Let's get back on track.

**lead  
EDITORIAL**