

## **The Capitol Report – Final Report**

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### **Perspective on the '08 Session: Success, Failure and Lessons Learned**

The metro Atlanta business community identified two very important goals through the Regional Business Coalition's 2008 Legislative Agenda – passing a State Water Plan and passing legislation to improve our transportation network by providing new funding options and better delivery of projects.

On the subject of water policy, the session can only be considered a success. Legislators approved the State Water Plan submitted after three years of work by the State Water Council and beat back a number of attempts to tie the metro region's hands when it came to managing its water. In addition, legislation was passed to simplify the reservoir permitting process and \$120 million was included in the state budget for reservoir, water and sewer projects.

This string of accomplishments should be attributed to the leadership of Governor Perdue, Lt. Governor Cagle, Speaker Richardson and the chairs of the Natural Resource Committees, Representative Lynn Smith and Senator Ross Tolleson. They all worked together towards a common purpose and the outcome demonstrates what happens when these leaders unite.

When it comes to transportation, it was a very different story.

House and Senate leaders agreed on a compromise for a constitutional amendment allowing a regional transportation SPLOST but the Governor's opposition to the legislation and the inability to find common ground on a plan to cut taxes led to the Senate Republican leadership opposing the plan. Combined with the four Democrats who either voted against the plan or did not vote, the end result was a narrow loss and another year of frustration for those that have worked so hard to find a solution to our transportation problems.

The failure to get the regional SPLOST legislation to final passage should not obscure some very important victories in the effort. Those achievements include:

- For the first time, an incredibly diverse coalition of stakeholders - representing large and small communities, transit advocates and road builders, environmentalists and the business community - united around a set of common principles and were able to maintain that unity through the entire session, even as the legislation changed and attempts were made to split the group apart.
- The House of Representatives passed Senate Resolution 845 with majorities exceeding the 2/3 requirement not once, but twice. There were some who doubted whether that was actually possible. The vote demonstrates once and for all that the will to enact a solution to our transportation funding crisis does exist in the General Assembly.

The lesson from the different outcomes to the water and transportation efforts is clear: A coordinated approach from state leadership is critical – whether the issue is tax reform, transportation funding or water.

The business community should not ignore the successes of the 2008 session as it contemplates its next steps. And the state's leadership should not ignore the lessons learned from this session as it formulates its plans for next year.

\*\*The Capitol Report is provided by your local chamber in partnership with the Regional Business Coalition. The Regional Business Coalition (RBC) is comprised of 16 local chambers of commerce and business organizations in the metro Atlanta region representing over 16,000 businesses. To learn more, please visit [www.rbcatl.com](http://www.rbcatl.com).